God's Garden

Sermons for Harvest and Flower Festivals

BY

CHARLES BROWN.
T. H. DARLOW, M.A.
J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.
JOHN C. LAMBERT, D.D.
G. CURRIE MARTIN, B.D.
GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.
JAMES MOFFATT, D.D.
GEORGE H. MORRISON, M.A.
ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.
THOMAS G. SELBY.
JOHN G. TASKER, D.D.
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MANCHESTER
JAMES ROBINSON, 24 BRIDGE STREET
1907

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GOD'S GARDEN

By W. L. WALKER

GOD'S GARDEN

"And the Lord God planted a garden."—GENESIS ii. 8.

I AM to speak to you to-day about where the flowers come from. Of course, they come originally from God; but we get them usually in *the garden.* The Bible tells us that the first thing made on the earth was a garden: "The Lord God planted a garden eastward"—looking towards the sunrise—"in Eden." Is not this very beautiful? It shows us the Divine *Ideal*—what God means the world and man to be. The *world* is, in the wide sense, God's garden: in the narrower, more special sense, His garden is the *soul of man.*

I.

Let us look first at the world as God's Garden.

This old Bible story tells us how He not only planted a garden and put man in it, but how He came Himself and walked therein—just as we would do in a hot country—in the cool of the day, seeking enjoyment therein. Perhaps you may think that this is *only* a story. We don't see God now coming down

and walking anywhere on the earth; we may not think that He is here at all. It is one of the commonest and one of the greatest of evils possible to imagine that God is not here, that He is not in the world to-day as truly as He is said to have been in those days of old. That is why there are so many bad boys and thoughtless girls in the world, so many bad men and women, so many quite indifferent to God and His concerns. They think that God is not here. Remember that God is Spirit-all-pervasive Spirit. You cannot see a spirit, not even your own. God has no bodily shape. These narratives are pictorial, as those who wrote them knew well. The New Testament tells us that "no man hath seen God at any time," and that no one *can* see Him. This story in Genesis represents in outward form lasting spiritual truth. To read it so as to think that God was once in the world in a way in which He is not in it to-day, is to lose the very lesson which it seeks to teach. As the poet Whittier says:

> "I reverence old-time faith and men;
> But God is near us now as then;
> His force of Love is still unspent;
> His hate of sin still imminent;
> . . . . . .
> Since everywhere the Spirit walks
> The Garden of the heart, and talks
> With man as under Eden's trees."

Now, when God walks in the garden of the world, *what does He behold?*

We know very well what He *wishes* to see, and

what alone can give Him enjoyment. It is just what anyone seeks to see when he walks in his garden. God wishes to behold His world fair and beautiful as a bright and smiling garden — His kingdom ruling over all—His will, which is goodness itself, done on the earth as it is done in heaven, where all is happiness.

But ah! is it this that God sees? and whose blame is it, if it is not? If a number of wild and thoughtless, and perhaps greedy, boys got into a fine garden and thought that nobody saw them, what would its owner behold when he came into it? Well, that is something like what God sees as He walks in His garden of the world. The wonder is that He is there at all.

This old story tells us how on one occasion God walked in His garden in the cool of the day; and *what did He see?* He was surprised to see nobody there. The man and the woman were *hiding* from Him. Was it not sad? And why was it? For the very same reason that the bad boys in the garden would hide themselves from its owner when he entered it. They had done wrong, and they knew it; they were ashamed and afraid, and so they sought to hide themselves. It is just what we are all ready to do when we find out that God is really here, and are conscious that we have done what is wrong: we would fain hide ourselves from Him. But it is quite impossible to do so, and it would be very sad for us if we could. For God is our first and our very best

Friend. We cannot do it: "Can any hide himself in secret places where I cannot find him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?"

"Adam, where art thou?" That voice of the Lord brought them out. Some day it will reach us all. Then we shall find that God has seen everything, and understood everything. The secret things which we fancied were hidden will be brought to light. All that we have done will come home to us. We may try to make excuses and to throw the blame on one another—as boys and girls sometimes do, and as Adam sought to blame Eve, and even God Himself; but it won't do. And we shall find ourselves punished for spoiling God's beautiful garden of earth, and making it so different from what He meant it to be. Would it not be nice to be workers with God, to make His world the garden He wishes it to become?

II.

But the soul of each individual man and woman, and of each boy and girl, is in a more special sense God's Garden.

Just as we often see a man have a large garden and in it a smaller spot devoted to flowers—a flower-garden in which he has a special delight. Such a garden God has planted in each soul, and although His great world-garden has been so greatly despoiled, He yet looks to find in individual souls that which

He created the world for. He comes and walks in this garden of the soul, and seeks to see and rejoice in the flowers that are growing and blooming therein.

Would you like me to tell you the *names* of some of the plants and flowers, the seeds of which He has set in this garden of the soul, and which He desires to see growing therein? Well, I shall name some of the most indispensable of them. Some of them are very humble in appearance—for it is not so much show as quality He looks for—and those that I shall mention cannot be done without. The white *daisy* of innocence and modesty. The fair *lily* of purity of heart and life. The red *rose* of love—of devotion to Himself, of love to one another, to every creature, and to all that is good. The sweet *violet* of humility, and the *heartsease*, which belongs to the same order. The fragrant and useful *thyme*, which seems there only to do good, and which scents all the more sweetly the more it is bruised. The healing *borage*, which soothes that which is wounded; and, last but not least, the plain and humble *honesty*, more beautiful after death than ever it was in life. These are indispensable, whatever else we may cultivate of a more brilliant and ornamental character. The most showy flowers are not always the best. They may sometimes be dangerous, even deadly, like the gorgeous orchids of the Demon Valley in Brazil, which lure the traveller on, and overpower him with their chloroform. God wishes us first of all to

cultivate the plain, long-standing, sterling virtues. Without these, no beauty, no showiness can satisfy Him. When the Lord God comes and walks in the garden of your soul and of mine, does He see the garden well kept, and all those flowers blooming therein?

Alas! does He not often find our garden lying waste and uncultivated, or filled with noxious weeds, such as selfishness, self-indulgence, ill-temper, harshness, unfairness, untruthfulness, impurity, vanity, and many another evil thing which He is grieved to behold, that grow and blossom there, to our own hurt and to the great injury of His world? That grand old Book tells how, when God came to the garden of the soul, He found it lying mostly waste and despoiled, the beautiful flowers lying trampled and withered, the keeper of the garden hiding himself. The sweet daisy of innocence was gone, trodden into the earth. The white lily of purity was broken off from its stalk. The petals of love's red rose were lying scattered on the ground. All the beautiful and useful plants were either marred or uprooted.

III.

What had caused such havoc in God's Garden of man's soul? Ah! this old story tells us. A beast had been there.

Sometimes, you know, a beast gets into the

garden—a cat or a dog, or some larger animal—and does a great deal of mischief. So in that fair garden of the soul a beast had appeared, and caused all this destruction. Over all therein, now, there was "the trail of the serpent." Now, do not let us misunderstand this, and get putting all the blame on the devil, or "the old serpent," as we are very prone to do. There is a deep meaning in this old story, truth as new to-day as it was when it was written. The beast represents that *animal nature* that is still in some measure in us all. No one is without it. He or she who is deceived in this matter, is not wise.

Boys and girls, do we not all know something of this beast in the garden? Sometimes he is a *lazy* animal, that keeps us from our lessons or work, or from exerting ourselves as we know we should do. Sometimes he is a *wild* beast, and not only tramples down the fair and good flowers that are growing or springing up within our souls, but incites us to do wild and wicked things. Sometimes he is an *unclean* beast, that defiles with impure and unholy thoughts the fair garden of the soul. And always he is a most *cunning* beast, who tells us a fine plausible story, and makes tempting promises, to lure us on. With deep wisdom it is written, that "the serpent was more subtle than all the beasts of the field." He would fain make himself out to be no beast at all.

Remember that the beast that tempts us to sin is never far away. That old Serpent of Eden is

within us all, and if we listen to his whispers, as Adam did, he will despoil the garden of the soul, destroy the fair flowers, cause us to grieve the Lord, and bring black sorrow to ourselves.

IV.

The Lord was sorry for the man and woman. He punished them; but it was in kindness, and wholly for their good. But he doomed the beast.

There should thenceforth be incessant warfare between the man and the beast. To the Serpent, the Lord God said: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Man should yet triumph over the beast.

Perhaps you have read Newman's fine hymn that pictures the gradual rise of man from the condition in which he now found himself—his rise by the help of God, and the coming of the conquering "seed of the woman":

> "And quickened by the Almighty's breath,
> And chastened by His rod,
> And taught by angel-visitings,
> At length he sought his God."

And then:

> "O loving wisdom of our God!
> When all was sin and shame,
> A second Adam to the fight
> And to the rescue came."

Jesus Christ, God's Son, in our flesh and name, faced and conquered that beast; and what Jesus wants of you and me is to believe that the beast is virtually vanquished for each one of us, and to enlist us as His soldiers in the Holy War against him and all his doings, both in our own hearts and in the world. Our whole life must be one course of incessant warfare against all that is of the lower nature merely, and of constant endeavour to cultivate all that our God and Father seeks to see growing and blooming in the garden of our own souls and in His larger garden of the world.

V.

Jesus Christ, we all know, comes "to save us." This old story shows us what salvation is, and Christ shows us the same thing in His own Life.

It is victory over the beast in our own lower nature, and the earnest cultivation of those things that are pleasing to God and good for His world—what St Paul describes as the conquest of "the spirit" over "the flesh." The beast "bruised the heel" of Christ, took vengeance on His flesh, got Him *crucified*. But in doing this he served the very cause of Christ, so that He effectually "bruised the serpent's head." He "conquered when He fell." For on that cross the death which the flesh must die

was manifested, so that we feel we can take God's gracious forgiveness to our hearts, and are made certain that God is on our side, not against us. And from His cross there comes the love that can win us to be on *His* side and truly on our own side—that can move us to receive Christ as our own Saviour and Leader, so that in His Spirit's power we may fight against the beast, and gain the victory over him, and cultivate in earnest those flowers of the soul's garden, which will prove not to be flowers that will fade, but to be *everlasting* flowers, which will bloom with still greater beauty when Christ has transplanted us into the richer soil and beneath the fairer skies of that heavenly land to which He has gone before us, and from which He cheers us onward.

In the presence of those fair flowers, which still shine in their beauty and breathe their fragrance on us, and which seem with such gentle, winning voices to tell us what our lives should be, let me appeal in the name of Jesus to all who hear me. We have not been preaching a sermon merely for the sake of preaching one. What we have been saying is all very real, and true, and earnest—it was all very real to Jesus Christ our Saviour. We all know something of the awful reality of the conflict between the higher and the lower nature, between the flesh and the spirit, between the beast and the man in the image of God. Can we look upon that cross where we behold "the flesh" shown in all its hideous evil, and see the reality of that death which it would bring

us unless we are made free by the Spirit of Christ within us, and not gladly receive into our hearts the Christ who has conquered our foe and who seeks to conquer it in us? If we prefer the Serpent to the Saviour, the beast to the man, our own lower selves to the glorious Son of God, do not wonder if it costs you much; for it is a terrible choice. Let *Christ* into the garden of your soul; give it up to Him, the *true* Divine man, "to dress it and keep it," and He will cast out all that is of the beast or lower nature in you, and will cause to spring up and grow and flourish the everlasting flowers of the soul's true life.

THE JOY OF HARVEST

By JOHN C. LAMBERT, D.D.

THE JOY OF HARVEST

"They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest."—ISAIAH ix. 3.

IN this chapter we find Isaiah striking some of the gladdest notes in all his glorious prophecies. Just listen to these words: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." The nation shall be multiplied, he goes on to say, and their joy shall be increased; "they shall joy before the Lord according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." And what is the cause of all this exultant gladness?—"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." No wonder that feelings of exalted joy filled the prophet's heart as he thought of this great Deliverer, who was to break the yoke of Israel's burden, and the rod of His oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

But at present we are to think not of the joy of the

Messiah's coming, but of that joy of harvest to which it is compared. The harvest joy must be a deep joy, and a reasonable joy, and a joy worth dwelling upon, since Isaiah uses it to set forth the gladness with which men should rejoice at the coming of the promised Messiah.

At this season of the year we are all called upon to share in the joy of the harvest. With us, it is true, harvest cannot have the same preponderating place in every mind that it had in Israel. The Jews of Isaiah's time were an agricultural people. They had few native manufactures, and little trade with other countries. They lived in immediate dependence upon their own soil. And so, if the harvest failed in Israel, that meant starvation to thousands, and a time of grief and desperate sorrow all over the land. With ourselves in these days it is different. Our commerce and our manufactures, and our free trade, make many lands our debtors. The granaries of all the world may be said to be open to us. A bad harvest in Great Britain does not mean a time of absolute famine to Britain's millions. Nevertheless, we do depend upon the harvest very closely for our well-being and happiness. Our dependence may not be so direct, and immediate, and absolute as that of Isaiah's countrymen, but it is real and solid all the same. It is still true, as in the days of old, that "the profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field." Thus, everyone in the land, from the ploughman to the monarch, should have

some share in the harvest joy. Let us think of the various strains of feeling that go to make up the gladness of the harvest season.

I.

It is a joy called forth by nature's beauty.

The time of harvest is a time of great natural beauty, and this beauty in itself makes men rejoice. God has made everything beautiful in its time—seed-time and harvest, summer and winter. The spring is beautiful, with its fresh young growth, its soft greenery, its universal outburst of new life. Summer is beautiful, with its rich foliage and flowers, its bright sunshine and blue skies. Winter is beautiful, with its white landscapes and clear frosty nights—"Abrahamic nights," an old Scotchman called them—when the Lord seems to say to us, as He said of old to the patriarch, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them."

But, in respect of sheer beauty, autumn gives place to no other season of the year. It has been called "the year's sunset"; and just as the sunset skies exchange the light of common day for the varying colours of the rainbow, so autumn scatters her rich, deep colouring far and wide across the landscape. The flowers assume their most gorgeous hues, the mountains clothe themselves in purple, the trees of the wood assume a raiment of changeful loveliness with which

Solomon in all his glory is not for a moment to be compared. But the most beautiful, as it is the most characteristic, feature in the autumn glory of a land like ours is the sight of the ripe harvest-fields, and all the various stages of the season of ingathering. Everything else in nature becomes but a setting and a framework for this central picture. Now we see the yellow corn as it waves and rustles in the breeze, and hear the pleasant sound of the reaper sharpening his scythe, or the cheerful rattle of the reaping-machine, softened by the distance into a kind of homely music. Again, in the full light of the harvest moon, we see the stooks standing in their long rows like soldiers in ranks and files. Or once more, we see the corn safely gathered in, and the tall stacks ranged snugly about the steading. And sights like these make us feel as a prophet of Israel felt long ago, when he had a vision of rich harvest-fields all over the land, and cried out at the sight, "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!"

II.

The joy of harvest is also the joy of hope fulfilled.

The farmer's life is a life of continual hope. 'He that plougheth," says the apostle, "should plough in hope." And when the ploughing is over and the seed-time comes, the farmer must sow in

hope likewise. In the morning he sows his seed, and in the evening withholds not his hand; but he knows not whether shall prosper either this or that. And when the time of sowing is past, the husbandman must wait now for the precious fruit of the earth, and have long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. He cannot make the rain to fall, and no more can he make the sun to shine. He must simply wait on in the patience of hope. And so when harvest comes at last, and all his hope and patience receive an ample reward, how can he fail to rejoice with the joy of those whose hopes, long cherished, have been at length fulfilled—that joy which a psalmist describes in these beautiful words: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

III.

Again, the joy of harvest is the joy of work completed.

There is a joy known to every worker in seeing his work brought to its completion. It may only be some little task that has occupied him for a few hours; and yet there is a satisfaction in seeing the thing done. But the joy of accomplishment is greater by far when the work has taken weeks and months of hard and anxious toil. Now, the harvest

brings with it the completion of a long period of toilsome and anxious labour. The harvest-home is the last page in the farmer's year-book. Nearly twelve months ago he began to work towards this consummation. The reaper had not long ceased his reaping when the ploughman began his ploughing. The weather might be wet, the wind might be bitter and piercing, but the farmer knew full well that "he who will not plough by reason of the cold, shall beg in harvest, and shall have nothing"; so he buttoned his coat, and yoked his horses, and followed his plough across the lea or along the mountain side. By and by there came the sowing and the harrowing, the rolling and the weeding, and finally, the exhausting labours of the weeks of harvest. From first to last it was a long, laborious business. No wonder that a sense of joyful satisfaction comes when the last cart-load rumbles into the stackyard, and the last stack is safely thatched and roped. This also is part of the joy of harvest—the joy of those who bring in their sheaves. It is an earthly type of a higher kind of harvest joy, when the life-work of the earnest soul is ended, and the King shall say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

IV.

But, above all, the joy of harvest is the joy of wants supplied.

In the ripe harvest-fields we see a renewed provision made for the natural wants of the human race. Those full ears of corn are the very staff of our life, they are the "bread which strengtheneth man's heart." And as hungry men rejoice when they see a table spread before their eyes, so should we rejoice at the sight of a bountiful provision for the wants of another year. It is not the farmer only who should be conscious of this joy, for a bad harvest is a calamity that soon makes itself felt all through the ranks of society. Within the memory of those still living, it meant pinching want, if not actual starvation, to millions of working people. And even yet, in spite of all the benefits that have been brought us by our ocean steamships and our free trade, any serious shortage of the harvest means a period of lessened comfort to multitudes, of actual suffering to very many. Upon the harvest of our own land we all depend more or less for our sustenance and our well-being throughout another year. And so when the earth has once more yielded us freely of its bounty, it is right and natural that we should rejoice with that joy which men feel when they know that their daily wants have been anticipated and supplied.

V.

And now, let us notice that the joy of harvest is never complete unless it is the joy of gratitude to God as the Giver of all.

In the land of Israel the gladness of the harvest was always a religious gladness, a gladness which was inspired by a sense of gratitude to Israel's God. The people believed that from first to last it was Jehovah who had carried on those natural processes which culminated in the bountiful gifts of the yellow harvest-fields. It was He who had prepared them corn when He had so provided for it—who had made the earth soft with showers, and blessed the springing thereof, and covered over the valleys with the ripening grain, and at last crowned the year with His goodness. And not content with having thankfulness to God in their hearts, those Israelites sought to give expression to their feelings in acts of public worship. They believed that the God who had been so gracious to them in nature deserved to be worshipped in His sanctuary, worshipped in such language as that of the 65th Psalm—that great harvest-hymn of the Old Testament Church: "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion: and unto Thee shall the vow be performed. O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." Three times every year a great national festival was held in Jerusalem, and with each of these festivals the joy

of harvest was associated more or less closely. At Passover, the earliest sheaf of ripe ears of barley was waved before the Lord as a thank-offering of the first-fruits. Seven weeks later came the feast of Pentecost, when the wheat and barley had been gathered in; and then the priest laid upon the altar an offering of loaves made from the new wheaten flour. Last of all was the Feast of Tabernacles, otherwise called "the feast of ingathering at the end of the year," which followed the vintage or grape harvest, and so marked the close of the whole agricultural year. These Jewish feasts and ordinances find no place in the institutions of the Christian Church; and yet the Church may well take a lesson from such customs of the Jews. Surely it is fitting that we too should come into God's house with the gladness of the harvest in our hearts, and that we should lift up to Him the voice of praise and thanksgiving, as we remember how the eyes of all wait upon Him and He giveth them their meat in due season, opening His hand and satisfying the desire of every living thing.

VI.

I cannot close without reminding you, as does the passage from which the text is taken, that there is a higher joy than the mere joy of the natural harvest.

Isaiah is speaking of the joy of those who shall see

the face of Israel's Messiah, and he takes the joy of the harvest-home simply to foreshadow that higher and fuller gladness. And the Lord Jesus Himself once likened the fruitfulness of His own life and death to the fruitfulness of nature as we see it in the golden harvest-fields: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die," He said, "it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. . . . And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." The corn which the farmers have been gathering into their stackyards and barns is only the meat which perisheth; while Jesus comes to us with the Bread of Life, the true food of the immortal soul. Will we not receive this Bread from Jesus, this Bread which is no other than Himself? Will we not taste and see how gracious the Lord is? Then we shall know that holy gladness of which the joy in harvest is only a dim foregleam and type—the gladness of those who have found that "Messias which is, being interpreted, the Christ," and who know Him at once as their Saviour and Lord.

A SPRING MEDITATION

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

A SPRING MEDITATION

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come."—SONG OF SOLOMON ii. 11, 12.

THE Scriptures are full of the fresh air of country life. Poets, psalmists, and prophets have generally been born and brought up amid country scenes, away from the hurly-burly and the crowded streets. It was there that they saw visions and got their inspiration. It is evident that most of the Bible writers had been educated there, and laid up in store the figures and illustrations which they used. They were lovingly familiar with all the operations and sights of garden, farm, and woodland. The psalms and prophecies are full of the glory of nature. All their imagery is fetched from this inexhaustible treasury, and their outbursts of praise and pictures of millenial righteousness owe their rich poetic splendour to this source; they were keenly sensitive to all natural beauty: the sunlight on the hills, the radiance on the waters, the trees with their living robes, and the flowers decking the meadows, spoke to them in language sweeter than music, and suggested, as Wordsworth says, "thoughts too deep for tears."

Moreover, nature was to them, as to the great Divine Teacher, a rich storehouse of parables. The beauty which the eyes saw suggested a beauty deeper than itself. The material symbolised the moral, the earthly was a pattern of the heavenly, and the passing glory hinted at eternal things. They had the quickened vision to which, as a poet writes, "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God."

In all this they proved their spiritual kinship with the great Master. For we remember well that He read a Divine meaning into all the common scenes of country life and of the natural world. He loved the sight of flowers and birds and watersprings, and delighted to find in them pictures of spiritual renewal and growth, texts for imperishable sermons, and indications of the great Father's wisdom and carefulness. He made what we call natural religion a constant part of His teaching, and bade us believe that God interprets Himself everywhere: in the grace and splendour of His handiwork, as well as in the writings of inspired men and the lives of His saints. He invited us, in fact, to open our eyes and minds to all the lessons which the seasons teach us as they recur. For truly they are God's words written for plain men in good round hand; fit for the learned, but not above the unlearned; full of divinity, but innocent of dogma; deep and high and broad, yet within reach of a little child.

How sweet and musical is this heralding of the

spring-time which I have read to you from the Song of Solomon! How happily it hits *our* mood, and expresses *our* delight, just as it told out the gladness of young souls who heard the singing of the birds three thousand years ago. Who is there that does not feel the poetry of the vernal season, and drink in the joy of its young life, and rejoice in the sight of all its budding and its promise! One is tempted to say, No one! but it would be a rash judgment. There are good, wise, great, and religious men to whom nature has little charm and the flowers of the field no speech. There are good men to whom the din of the streets is more welcome than the songs of birds in the spring-time. Dr Johnson hated the quiet places of nature, and was never happy except in the thick of life; Socrates had no love for green field and garden, all his interests were among men; and even St Paul, if we may judge from his writings, found his raptures in work done among the human throng, and was not keenly sensitive to the natural things which his Master loved.

We do not envy these men in that one particular. They were great, richly endowed souls, with one sweet capacity missing. We thank God that we have it, that most good men have it in large measure. It is a gift of God with a touch of heaven in it. It makes the whole world a temple, especially in the spring-time, with stained windows and altar lights and innumerable choristers; it makes us hear speech in a thousand languages to which other ears are deaf.

"The winter is past, and the time for the singing of birds is come." There is a sigh of glad relief in the words, as if some long pain had gone, as if some nightmare had been lifted up, and the spirit of joy had come dancing into our lives again. The winter is long, at least we always feel it long. It is like an unwelcome guest that prolongs its stay. It will not regulate its movements by the calendar. The day for its departure is fixed, but it tarries. It seems to go a dozen times, and comes back again. The spring-time comes with lingering feet. It has to fight with winter for every inch of ground gained. It is like the slow battle of goodness against evil, with the long-deferred result. But it always wins, as goodness always wins; though we hate delays, and sometimes in our impatience learn despair. But it comes in God's due time without fail. There has never been a year without its spring-time, and never will be; and like every precious thing of God, it is well worth waiting for. At last the long nights and the heavy skies and the freezing blasts are gone, and the flowers do appear upon the earth. God's clock does not always keep our time, but it keeps good time, and all the promises are sure.

I think we long for the spring season, not less, but more, as we get on in years, partly because our burdensome tabernacle as it gets older bears the genial airs better than the nipping breezes, and partly because age appreciates young things more than the young themselves. Poets have generally

represented spring as the season of youth. Artists have pictured it as a child's face, or in the form of a happy maiden. It is supposed to be the season in which youth's fancy revels and youth's senses delight.

"In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast;
In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest;
In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove:
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

That may be all true, but it is equally true that young life has no monopoly of the feast. The older folk get a full share of that particular banquet. However many years we carry, if we have retained the simple, honest heart, the spring-time never fails to put warmer blood into our veins, and thoughts of love, beauty, and hope into our minds. Each spring season seems to clothe the earth in daintier array than the last, and unveil to us pictures of loveliness undreamt of before. When the great Scotch divine, Dr Chalmers, was dying, his friends gathered round him and talked of heaven and its rewards. It was the spring-time, and he asked them to lift him up to let him look once more on the trees and meadows, and then he exclaimed: "Eh, but it's a bonnie world; thank God for His bonnie world." It never looked so fair as in the hour when he was quitting it. So may it be with all of us in the final hour. God's heaven will be no

less sweet because we have found God's world winsome to the last.

There are religious meanings in the spring season which appeal especially to those of riper years. *Its sights and sounds breathe calm into our restless, feverish spirits.* They are far removed from the world of faction, strife, and sin. They rebuke our vulgar ambitions, fussy activities, small envyings, and flaunting prides, for in all of them we discern a spirit of infinite peace and glad content. There is no striving for pre-eminence. Each thing in its place is best. Each thing is well pleased to be just what God has made it. The great and small harmonise to make one splendid picture. The lordly tree is far grander than the violet, but not more perfect. It was not to the cedar of Lebanon, but to the insignificant lily, that the Saviour pointed when He wanted to fling contempt upon the garish glory of Solomon. The cowslip does not envy the hyacinth. The sober-hued thrush, piping its sweet love-song, frets not for the flaunting plumage of the peacock. There is enough of gladness and heart sunshine in them all, and no murmuring. They are always whispering to the heart of man the secret of a quiet and happy life. Further, the spring-time reminds us of the great Father's impartiality, and the thoughts of kindness which go forth from Him towards every son and daughter of Adam. The singing of the birds and springing up of the flowers are for all. The sun shines and

the rains descend upon the evil and the good, the just and unjust, the rich and poor, the old man and little child. There is no private property here, nothing that you can write in title-deeds, and shut off for your exclusive enjoyment. The world of beauty is too large to be walled in and fenced off for fortune's favourites. In God's great temple of Nature, whatever it may be in the churches, the poor are as welcome as the rich, the seats are all free, and there is no collection.

Yes, *the universal Fatherhood of God is proclaimed in the voices of the spring season* almost as distinctly as in the gospel of His Son. For its bounties come to all, regardless of merit. "He openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." Nature does not discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. It does not go behind the scenes and ask whose field it is that its gentle rains open and its life-giving warmth fertilises. On the garden of the knave and gamester, the trickster and the hypocrite, the blasphemer and the atheist, no less than on the field of the honest and pious, the confessor and the saint, it stoops to smile and drop its benedictions. It asks not whose eyes shall behold its treasures. It flings its profusion of wild flowers and May blossoms on every hedge and over every meadow, asking no questions, demanding no certificate of character, as a condition of its gifts. It spreads its glorious panorama before the eyes of the sensualist and miser as freely as before the pure eyes

of the innocent maiden and guileless child. It is no respecter of persons, giving with equal lavishness to the meanest and noblest of men.

Yes, these particular mercies of God are for all people—like the glorious gospel of the Blessed God, in which there is no withholding or giving according to merit. It is not in a man's garden that you are to look for the rewards of faith and prayers. He gets no more sunlight than his neighbour, and probably no ampler harvest.

And yet there is a great difference made. For, if the eyes are sordid and the heart debased, what does it matter whether there is spring or winter about? There is always winter in the soul, and therefore everywhere, for the people who forget God. For them the time for the singing of birds never comes, and the flowers of hope never appear on the earth. What cares the habitual gambler for the lark's song, or the hawthorn's silvery spray? What recks the sensualist or the miser of the season's changes? What are the primroses and anemones to the blear-eyed drunkard, or the soul polluted with the filthinesses of the flesh? God is good to all; but if the eye which beholds the goodness is an evil eye, vain is all the giving. It is only the clean, unselfish, praying, loving, and thankful soul who really possesses and enjoys these things. He alone can say with St Paul, "All things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Yet I think that when all this has been said, the

sweetest lesson of spring-time remains untold. Its greatest word is that resurrection word, which it has been speaking to the children of men through all generations, and which it speaks only less forcibly than the lips of the Son of God.

The spring-time is truly a bursting open of the sealed sepulchre, and an awaking from the sleep of death. In the winter, death has dominion over all things. If one from another clime, who has never seen our spring season, were to come and view our green and pleasant land when it is hard bound with frost and covered with the snow of winter, when not a blade of grass or tuft of foliage is visible, he would say there can be no life, greenery, or beauty here for evermore. It is all stone-dead—beyond the reach of resurrection.

And now behold it when the flowers do appear: the Almighty Miracle-worker has laid His hand upon it, and life springs up from the dead, and the black dust is transfigured into myriad forms of beauty.

And so we are always reading in the spring-time the great thought of immortality and larger life beyond. It comes to us in the winter of our sorrows and fears, when we are grieving over lost hopes and lost friends, and saying in our despair, "They can never be ours again. Death holds them too fast"; and it whispers to us, "Be not faithless, but believing. Interpret the message which I bring to you; and learn that the earth shall give forth its dead, and every worthy thing that you have loved shall have a resurrection."

THE NEAR INGATHERING

By THOMAS G. SELBY

THE NEAR INGATHERING

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest."—JOHN iv. 35.

WHEN Jesus took part in this memorable colloquy by the wayside, it is not at all certain that a harvest landscape, with the figures of bending reapers, lay round the well where He sat. Perhaps the plains of Ephraim were yet in the grip of winter, or only just beginning to grow green with the upspringing wheat-blade. He wishes to make the disciples see before them the scene of a great spiritual ingathering. The proverb they are accustomed to use, "Are there not four months, and then cometh the harvest?" implies that no results of lasting value can be reasonably looked for in a day. The rule expressed in that playful saying they were predisposed to apply with the utmost rigour to the religious possibilities of the Samaritans. The correction suggested by Christ's larger hope, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest," implies that results of surprising value may sometimes be reaped in a day. The best work

of the kingdom of heaven is made ready for us at unexpected times, and in places where we did not dream of doing good. The disciple who partakes of the spirit and follows in the steps of his Master, will always find harvest fields in view.

The prophet Amos paints a picture in which the tasks of preparation and the joy of vintage and harvest are gathered together into the same canvas. The holy soil has acquired such mystic fertility, and the dew of the Divine blessing is so unstinted, that sower and reaper are never out of sight of each other. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed." The year-long circle of unbroken fruitfulness is an image that stamps itself indelibly upon the soul. Jesus reminds His followers that in the spiritual sphere there may be processes of accelerated growth which almost cancel the term of months we are accustomed to interpose between seed-time and harvest.

Our Lord is speaking of the susceptibility of the Samaritans to religious appeal, and of the swift success so soon to crown His few hours of work and teaching in their midst. That His view is much more sanguine than that of the disciples, is the outstanding lesson of these memorable words. The disciples thought of Sychar as a mean, benighted town with a market, where they might perhaps buy the necessary supplies for the next stage of their journey, and find to their chagrin how a bitter,

hereditary feud would put up prices in the bazaar, and subject them to exactions they could ill afford. Jesus thought of the town He watched from the well-side as a scene of holy charity and toil, a harvest field inviting to rich spiritual gain, and to festal joy. The disciples were saying within themselves, if indeed they gave the subject a thought at all, The feud between the worshippers at Gerizim and Jerusalem must be first healed—healed by the surrender of the Samaritans, and, in the far-off future this hybrid race may be brought into Messiah's kingdom. The men and women making free to come into the presence of the Master are of the blood of Sanballat and his kin, who resisted the rebuilding of the temple and the holy city. Such wrongs are hard to forget. But the Son of Man with searching insight knew that by His all-conquering grace and gentleness He could remove the schisms of centuries. If harvests are to be garnered from such fields, thought James and John, it must be in the far-off generations. Wretched children of renegade sires, who once joined hands with the heathen in seeking to thwart the children of Abraham, the heirs of the promises! Surely the ban of God rests upon them, and what part can such have in the Messiah and His kingdom? But Jesus saw an underlying and indestructible work of preparation that had opened their minds to the hope of the gospel. A rapid spiritual ripening was in process here, such as was found by the great Teacher only in rare souls in Judæa and Galilee. In this providential

halt at Sychar He saw a golden opportunity which escaped the honest but superficial partisans who were His travelling companions.

It is only in the ardour of unchecked and inexperienced youth that the world's reformers have ventured to expect the immediate victory of their cause. Sooner or later, most of them have been compelled to admit, that it is well if after the lapse of two or three generations, national habits can be changed and new thoughts assimilated. Oversanguine prophets, baffled by the harsh logic of events, pass out of view. It was otherwise with the Reformer of Nazareth. Whilst few outward signs appeared to encourage, He looked for a swift recompense to this wayside ministry. His own disciples could not fail to feel the lure of His love, but His methods often puzzled them. Casual hearers were still more perplexed. They felt His drawings and were awed by His majesty, but could not fathom His mission and its underlying aims. And yet in spite of this Jesus felt that close by Him stood many who were prepared to shed their crude and ungenerous bigotries, and ripen into obedient discipleship.

Of all places in the world Sychar seemed least likely to yield the first-fruits of a coming harvest. If He had recently met with but a poor welcome in Jerusalem, He surely could not hope to mend things in this home of heresy. When the disciples came back with their frugal supplies of food, they were surprised that Jesus should have occupied Himself in

the interval of their absence with an informal discourse, and still more surprised that, by some ironic mischance, He should have allowed a frivolous woman to become His first disciple and missionary. If He had deliberately chosen to evangelise this mixed and superstitious race, which had perhaps not felt in any degree the influence of the Baptist's preaching, why not call for the elders of the synagogue, or address Himself to the ruling authorities of the town? How futile to talk with an ill-instructed woman who had chanced to bring her pitcher to the well at the noonday hour! The Master and His disciples looked at the question from contrasted, not to say opposite, standpoints.

And yet His was the far-seeing and theirs the shortsighted outlook. The issue justified the sanguine forecast. Before the Master had tasted the food pressed upon Him by His disciples, knots of docile and inquiring Samaritans were already tramping through the corn-fields and halting at the well, ready to take God's message from the lips of a Jew, if the prophet should prove Himself of that unhappy race. Many a holy longing lay hidden under the rancour and blood-feuds of the past, and the first sheaves of a spiritual harvest were about to make glad the soul of the Son of Man. Here were these men, with a heathen taint in their veins, rankling with implacable antagonisms to the Jew and all things Jewish, by immemorial tradition superstitious, schismatical, heterodox. Aliens could never be expected to hear

and understand a new Rabbi, whom even His own brethren declined to receive. He must be accepted by the Jew before He could hope to enlist the faith of these outcasts. But they misjudged the position. Perhaps it was easier for these Samaritans to accept a Messiah not yet welcomed by the Jewish nation, than it would have been if He had already received the homage of the authorities at Jerusalem. The religious possibilities of these people had been underestimated. As a matter of fact, it proved that there was here a purer desire for the prophet sent from God, and an inclination to more unquestioning loyalty to His authority, than in Jerusalem, where the desire was complicated by political aspirations. Although no prophet had arisen for centuries to fan this flickering hope of the fathers, it had been kept alive by portions of the early Scriptures. And the hope was still burning dimly in these men and women who were gathering around Him. This was no exceptional or isolated outburst of faith. The healed leper who returned to give thanks was a Samaritan, whilst the nine who ignored the debt of gratitude were Jews; and in one of the last episodes of His ministry Jesus did not forget His early experiences in this schismatical province, for He immortalised His faith in the religious possibilities of this hated race by making a Samaritan traveller the hero of one of His parables.

The main features of this incident, which verify our Lord's assurance of a harvest ever near, are re-

peated in the experiences of the present day. Men come before us from time to time whose religious natures are maimed, mutilated, defective. They have been familiarised with a type of teaching that in value, lucidity, fullness, can scarcely perhaps be put on a par with the Pentateuch parchments so jealously guarded in the Samaritan synagogue. As we study such men, and call to mind the races with meagre opportunities and half-starved spiritual instincts of which they are types, we are ready to say, What a long and weary task to evangelise them, and lift their standards of conduct to a normal Christian level! The time of reaping is very far off. What a vain dream to think that our own day can see the ingathering of the harvest! But we find, when our eyes are opened, that the providential preparation, all unknown to us, has advanced to a stage we had scarcely thought possible. We are perhaps surprised before long at the quick response accorded to the message of the gospel, the willing surrender to Him, who is the sovereign Guide and Saviour of human life, the healthy, unstinted, spiritual fruitfulness that greets our eyes, whilst we are yet doubting. God's harvest was nearer than we could anticipate, and our estimate of the weary stretches of time between the scattering of the seed and the festal ingathering, was the miscalculation of a stupid and intractable unbelief.

Is the work which redeems men from ignorance and condemnation always slow, and must we, per-

force, think of grand spiritual issues as relegated tc the after-times? We are ready to say, All growth must have its appointed cycles, and it is fanaticism to assume the steps can be accelerated. The analogies of evolution have rooted themselves in the modern brain, and our religious outlook has a sombre Darwinian hue in it. The epochs of preparation are inevitably long. It takes ages to modify a bodily structure, and the slight changes which effect themselves in the notions and habits of nations, and of certain classes within the nations, occupy centuries. God, we are told, works slowly, and good people smile at the thought of a nation born in a day. Such is the average judgment even within the churches. But some views upon which Darwin put the stamp of his scientific genius are in dispute, even amongst his own followers. Man can work modifications of habit and structure far faster than Nature. By a careful selection of seedlings he can shorten the days of growth and bring near the time of maturity. Under the keen eye of science and helped by its deft hand, plant-life lends itself to new and almost miraculous creations, and changes its time-cycles of development. And the things possible with men are surely not impossible with the Lord of men.

Some months after this journey, as Jesus stood on the shores of the Galilean lake, He focussed into a miraculous hour all the forces of the seed-time and the harvest. When His hand touched the barley

loaves and He had given thanks, the time-limits of normal growth were dissolved. Into the span of the moment there gathered the fruitfulness of a hundred showers, countless baptisms of sweet dew, the mellow, vivifying warmth of a summer's round of suns. And so when Jesus touches a soul with the life-creating breath of His word. The subtle forces of His character can act on the hidden half of a human personality with a speed which outstrips the slow pace of training and mental evolution. Into the processes of a moment He can summon the potencies that, under normal conditions, must needs operate through generations to produce great results. The Lord's word to his disciples, just back from the market, takes his enlightening and redeeming mission out of the category of natural things. The magic harvest may rise into view without intervening months of preparation. Or, to put it more rationally, those months have been fulfilled in ways unknown to us. Spiritual growth transcends the cycles of Nature because the gospel is a miracle, and conforms to the transcendent law of miracle.

The Master talks in terms of the harvest, whilst the disciples talk in terms of the bleak, weary seed-time, because He looks into the Father's bosom of eternal love, and they are blinded by petulant, partisan tempers to God's impartial goodwill towards all men. In their thought, religion in Samaria was scarcely due to begin, even when Jesus, wearied with the journey, sat by the well-side and taught a

casual loiterer there. Jesus believed in immediate spiritual fruitions, because He believed in the redemptive counsels which were before the creation of the race. The legal habit of mind assumed that salvation must be initiated by diligent self-training, and the use of a worship free from every element of defect; whilst the evangelical temper in Jesus assumed that all noble ingatherings arise from vitalising purposes in the Divine mind. The harvest had been prepared for before this well-side scene unfolded itself to view. Perhaps this was the first visit to Sychar, and no prophet of Israel had spoken in field or town for centuries; but these degenerate populations had not been forgotten, and the quickening breath of the Spirit had not died out in the hearts of men. This uncommon view was determined by an uncommon insight into the ways of that mighty unchanging grace whose messenger Jesus was. The light and summer of the upper world were glowing in His soul, and He looked for the same holy warmth in the souls of others. From the very beginning, human minds of all sorts and conditions had been mysteriously strung and toned in view of the salvation which was to be revealed in the last times. The ministry of Jesus and His disciples marks a great crisis in the redemptive history, but the breaking up of the fallow ground and the sowing of a hidden seed were in process before the days of this sojourn. The Jewish sacrifices, and indeed the sacrifices of which they were refined and uplifted types, antici-

pated some of the grace which had its historical forthsetting in the Cross. The gospel preached under the forbidden tree did not return void, but bore fruit, according to its kind, in every generation. In some undefined sense men had been providentially dealt with upon the basis of the coming redemption, and harvests were gathered before the feet of the Son of Man trod the fields of earth. While Jesus was yet in the bosom of the Father, men were forgiven, made ripe in those lowly pieties they could understand, and received into the rest of God. And surely as much as this was possible now. Spiritual life demands no rigid and far-extending epochs for its germination and development. Jesus has visions of a joyful reaping, and He encourages the disciples to be ready with the sickle, for they are on the threshold of significant results. The presence of Jesus is quickening the growth of faith and bedewing it with great benedictions. He contemplates all possibilities from the standpoint of God's catholic and ageless love. Our earthborn misgivings blind us to the visions of harvest. He tells us the fields are white.

We often talk in terms of the seed-time rather than of the harvest, because we are met by traits and idiosyncrasies which antagonise with our interests and jar upon our tastes, and this prevents us from seeing those providential preparations for faith and salvation which often lie just below the surface of men's lives. Jesus Christ has an eye that pierces through skin-deep antipathies, and detects long

rooted and vigorous desires which are rich in spiritual promise. He surveys the long processes which have been producing an effectual inward adaptation to the truth. The mists which darken our eyes are very dense and very earthly. We will not see what Jesus saw, and argue the harvest is about as far off as it can be. In the man who has been under God's training and who has felt His breath we see one who provokes our dislike, because he belongs to another clan or class in conflict with our own. We hate the foreigner, and think his religious aptitudes inferior, because he is suspected of an intention to build high tariff-walls. He has a code of manners, and a bill of fare for his table, that does not commend itself to us. He may even possess lands we should like to exploit. Of course he suspects us, just as gravely as we suspect him, and perhaps shows it, and we are unwilling to believe that he is susceptible to the process of a spiritual conversion. But his inward readiness for the pure impartial truth, as it is in Jesus, is greater than we know. Men who seem to be quite irreligious have a root of belief at the core of their being, have passed through their harrowing disciplines, and have secret misgivings which incline them to listen to an authoritative gospel. Under a superficial carelessness there is a strong desire for better things, and perhaps the conversion when it comes is more rapid and decisive than amongst those who outwardly conform to the requirements of the Christian faith. The heretic often yields himself up more resolutely to

the power of a new life than the irreproachably orthodox.

The work of grace is often far more advanced in the heart of a child than we imagine. A religious maturity now and again shows itself which is a vast surprise to us, and great truths in theology are grasped with mysterious facility. We speak of sowing the seed when we teach the young, and such similitudes are of course permissible, because the coming result is often hidden from us, but the harvest time is already at hand. An unknown inheritance of religious sensibility and responsiveness has been prepared for by God's work in the souls of past generations. Behind the distracted attention and the apparent obstinacy of temper there is an understanding of the truth, and a sympathy with it, out of all proportion to the years attained. "That boy has got to ferment," was a piquant American comment once passed upon a youth who was going astray. "He'll come to something by and by, but he's first got to ferment." Ferment, alas! may sometimes end in irrecoverable rottenness. Do not go upon the assumption that in any opening life there must be a fated stage of waste and barrenness. The ripening aptitude for faith in the normal child is greater than we judge it.

This is true also when we pass beyond the bounds of Christendom into regions accounted evil and benighted. It is a matter of common observation that the child-like impulsive races, in a low state of

culture, often undergo a quick and a genuine conversion. And amongst the educated, non-Christian races of the world, where the meek and tractable temper may be wanting, and scepticism and superstition are mixed into a curious conglomerate, traces of a striking providential preparation for the gospel are often found. The belief in God and immortality is embedded in the oldest literatures of the world. But perhaps the most wonderful thing of all is the unspoiled inerrancy and the vital power of the conscience. In some modern ships the compasses by which the course is shaped are placed on insulated wood supports, high above the iron of the ship, so as to be out of reach of the magnetic currents set up by the masses of iron. In the same way the moral sense reflects a direct guidance flashed down from on high, which is untouched by the bias of evil customs and the corruptions of existing society. The study of Comparative Religion, so far from relieving us of the obligation to evangelise those who know not the Christ or His gospel, only shows how far God has been making ready for His servants in the past. The days of harvest are nearer than we have thought possible. He who is the Light lightening every man, is assured of it.

Our Lord implies that where the need arises His disciples may rightly look for an acceleration of the normal processes of growth. In judging God's work in human souls, all our conventional estimates of time must be laid aside. The Prophet of Nazareth had

only three days in which to deal with these groups of inquirers, whilst He had three years in which to instruct His followers and prepare them for their future calling. In such an emergency a quickened religious maturity might rightly be looked for. The proverbial times and seasons, defined and laid down by our earth-born wisdom, ignore those Divine forces which may sometimes carry the work of the teacher and the prophet to great issues in a briefer space than we suppose. When we look at the human rather than the Divine side of life, we assume that the march of progress must needs be by slow and gently graded steps, even though God Himself lead us. The ascent must be from little to more, from more to yet larger increments, from the finite to the immeasurable. The pathway of advance cannot widen itself out in a moment. Such views may be correct enough when we are dealing with affairs into which God does not come in uncommon grace, but are irrelevant when He is Incarnate for our help. Will the days and the months gird Him with new attributes, or discipline His saving energies to greater proficiency? Can the lapse of time instil a new tenderness into His catholic compassions, put fresh warmth into His soul-ripening loving-kindness, or charge His breath with a new secret of fruitfulness? Do not let us look upon the Messiah's work, either in His earthly days or under the dispensation of the Spirit, as part of a system of steel-like rigidity. The space between the seed-time and the harvest is not unalterable.

Human skill can accelerate the processes of natural growth. The agriculturist can pick out a seed which will outstrip its fellows in the race towards maturity. By skilful selection from a bed of saplings the nurseryman can grow a fine-grained timber in twenty years that once took twice or thrice as long. The fruit-grower can hurry on the ripening of his grapes by artificial light. And what can be done in the natural sphere is still more possible in the spiritual. Where practicable, human love insists on wings for its ministries. The submarine cable must carry credit for relief-funds to the victims of fire and earthquake, and a special train must bear the famous physician to the bedside of his imperilled patient. Wireless telegraphy, and not the slow courier, must carry news of help to the beleaguered garrison. And God's love is winged. These accelerations in the methods of help which are possible to us, are still more possible to God.

We fail to recognise the days of visitation, and miss golden opportunities of ingathering, because we are possessed by legal tempers which exaggerate the part to be played by human instrumentalities, and slow down God's methods to our own. We transfer the restraints which hamper man's work to the work of Divine grace in the soul, and limit the love and power of the Most High. We teach, and bear our poor faint witness to the realities of the spiritual life, and assume little entrance has been won into the minds around us, because we have

forgotten the Divine atmosphere which inspheres every man and stimulates his finer faculties to faith. Into natures apparently barren and inhospitable, grace flows like a hidden, unwasting spring, and harvests rise in unexplored nooks of the world. Men assume that salvation from sin and its pains is a slow and tedious process. In his treatise on Baptismal Regeneration, the learned and severely devout Dr Pusey teaches that from post-baptismal sin there can be no assured deliverance in the present life. "To those who have fallen, God holds out a light in a dark place, sufficient for them to see their path, but not bright or cheering as they would have it." The great High Churchman disavows the doctrines of penance, and of a fiery purgatory, which are complementary to the Roman view of post-baptismal sin ; but from such statements gloomy forebodings are inevitable. The cheerless winter must shroud the soul through the present life, and perhaps also must depress it through protracted stages of the intermediate state. There must needs be a long waiting for the festal harvest. But the winged pity of the Most High spurns our slowness. Jesus was not afraid lest His disciples should expect too much from the Lord of the harvest, but too little. The Divine light in the soul can ripen the fruits of righteousness with amazing swiftness. Jesus Christ was alive to those stages of preparation where the infinite love had been spending itself, and this explains the difference between His view and the

disciples'. More often than not He speaks of His servants as reapers. "I have sent you to reap that on which ye bestowed no labour." It is to "the Lord of the harvest" they must pray for the forth-sending of new labourers. In His view it was a time for the thrusting in of the sickle rather than for the breaking up of the clods, for He knew the freeness and the fullness of His Father's mercy, and the long preparations which had been made. The spirit of faith will help you to realise in your most irksome toils, that after all you are in the midst of a festal harvest scene.

If the fields are already "white," how is it that the years are lean and the ingatherings few? In the days of the Judges the plains of Philistia were once white with the billowing crops, and the ripe harvests stretched from the foot-hills of Judæa to the silver thread of sea that marked the Mediterranean shore. But one year the farmers did not find their garners full, and it was heart-breaking to go forth into the fields. It was like reaping in the track of a prairie fire. The soil was not exhausted. Nothing was alleged against the quality of the seed-corn. Showers had fallen and suns shone as in the most prosperous years. The grim, ruffianly Samson had been abroad, and had sent his coupled jackals, with firebrands tied to their tails, into the standing corn. The sickle had little work till Samson had been bound and overthrown. And there are grim giants who play havoc with these better harvests—

the representatives of the liquor trade, the kings of the turf and their book-making minions by the wayside, the traffickers in degrading pleasures and amusements. We license and protect the foxes, put a ring round the devil's playground, and allow the most successful destructionists to sit in the House of Peers. The rulers of the nation have sometimes very little fear of the Lord of the harvest before their eyes. It is not only at home we give free course to the agencies of havoc and woe. Amongst the Cross River natives of Nigeria monuments to the dead are built of pyramids of empty gin-bottles. By our excise system in India we encourage drinking customs that are repugnant to all the religions professed on that great continent. We have neutralised the work of the Christian missionary in China by a discreditable and degrading trade, and if the white harvests are at last saved from ruin, it will be through the action of the Chinese Government itself, rather than through the virtuous initiative of our own. We do not know the scope of religious possibility amongst the non-Christian races of the world, and shall never know till we bind the devil, who directs so much of our international trade. If you are not one of the King's reapers, at least have some little care for His crops. The fields are His, and hold a sacred seed. Let this diabolic wantonness done in the name of the nation come to an end. If there are acres of ash and blackness where the corn should have been waving, that is no proof that

sun and rain have failed. It may be the brand of our foolishness and impiety. It is the Lord's will we should realise that our days are spent in the times of harvest. Do not neglect or mistrust the ingathering.

THE ARK AMONG THE SHEAVES

By T. H. DARLOW, M.A.

THE ARK AMONG THE SHEAVES

"And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it."—1 SAMUEL vi. 13.

THERE are some fashions that never alter; there are some festivals which age cannot wither nor custom stale. We are keeping to-day what is perhaps the most primitive, the most venerable of human celebrations, dating back from the childhood of the world. Before history began, men rejoiced and gave thanks when they gathered in the kindly fruits of the earth. The Hebrew husbandman understood the joy of harvest, as often as harvest came round. That joy is as natural to us now as it was to our earliest sires. Seed-time and harvest, and summer and winter, still repeat their alternations. The solemn march of the seasons does not quicken, in spite of modern progress. Year after year you see your orchards, first snowy with spring blossoming and then ruddy with autumn fruit, in the same old-fashioned way. Year after year you walk among the corn-fields till the green ears turn golden and the mower putteth in his sickle, because the harvest is come. Once more it is come

and ended; once more you have watched the last load roll home into the rickyard and the last stack covered in. God has brought you back again once more to this thanksgiving season. Through many changes and chances, after strange losses and gains, you are here again by His mercy: are you building Him an altar—a spiritual altar to the memory of His great goodness? Are you binding Him a sacrifice—an inward sacrifice of heart and will reconsecrated to His love? Or are you only saying within yourself, as that prosperous farmer in the Gospel said on the night of his harvest-home: "I will pull down my barns and build greater"? Are you forgetting, as he forgot, that strict and solemn account concerning which Christ has warned us—the harvest which is the end of the world, the reapers who are the angels?

The chapter from which this text is taken carries us far back among primitive Israel, and gives us a vivid glimpse into that wild, stormy, superstitious time when as yet there was no king and no temple, when every man fought for his own hand and did what was right in his own eyes. How can we explain such a period in the history of God's chosen people as the period which intervened between the death of Joshua and the death of Samuel? How are we to justify these blood-stained chapters in the Bible?

The answer to the question may be brought out most clearly by means of a comparison. Before we can do justice to the dark ages of the Jewish Church,

we must call to mind the dark ages of the Christian Church. For the two epochs, as has often been pointed out, possessed many features in common. Both of them are barbarous times, full of fights and raids and massacres and brutal disorders, when few laws were sacred and few lives were safe. In both periods the gloom is brightened by sunny, chivalrous figures—national heroes who shine out through the haze of legend. Gideon, for example, is like a Hebrew William Wallace: Deborah is like a Hebrew Joan of Arc. And in both eras the popular religion had grown degenerate and corrupt. Too often its ministers proved themselves greedy and licentious men. Superstition became rampant, with all the mischief which superstition breeds. The Book of Judges tells us how Micah's images and teraphim were stolen by men of another tribe in Israel, just as Thomas à Becket's relics were stolen from Canterbury by monks of another monastery. The sons of Eli, the high priest, hurried the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines, just as at our English battle of the Standard the sacred banners of the four great Saxon saints waved from a wooden car in the centre of the fighting. The Ark itself, the consecrated shrine of God's peculiar presence, was borne hither and thither, and captured, and restored, in the same fashion in which mediæval ecclesiastics were wont to carry about those precious jewelled reliquaries which possessed awful and mysterious powers to curse or to bless their guardians. To this

day, in Bavaria, you may see the village priests bearing their Host in solemn procession round the yellow corn-fields, to hallow the crop before the sickles begin. Perhaps the ancient Hebrew harvesters at Beth-shemesh saw the Ark arrive among their sheaves with a similar thrill of reverence and joy.

It is difficult indeed for us to realise how much the Ark must have signified to those simple, primitive folk. It was the palladium of their national faith, which had been lost in battle and was now brought back from its captivity. It was the venerable relic of their fathers' wandering in the wilderness. It was the sacred chest which held the mysterious Tables of stone, written over with the Law of man's duty by the finger of God Himself. It was the visible token of Jehovah's presence, the pledge of His mighty protection, the mercy-seat of His grace.

"And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the Ark, and rejoiced to see it."

I.

Here, at the outset, we may take home to ourselves one lesson of this recovery. The Ark, as has been said, was for Israel the shrine and symbol of the Real Presence. Is it not still true that God's presence, which disappears in our strife, can be recovered and restored in our labour?

Miserable experience teaches us that we generally lose the Lord as soon as we fall to fighting and contending. In this guarded land of ours, we have forgotten for centuries what actual warfare means on English soil. To realise the old moss-trooping, free-booting days, with their perpetual raiding and skirmishing, you must be stationed, for instance, among the turbulent border-tribes on the Indian frontier. There you understand how it becomes a stern duty to fight such raiders and plunderers, for the sake of protecting peaceful folk. War in itself need not always be wicked. Its worst evil lies in the ferocious passions which war is only too certain to breed. And we can indulge these same unbrotherly passions in a strike or in an election at home. Though we never handle a rifle or draw a sword, few of us pass through the world without getting mixed up with strife and contention. The peacefullest man cannot always avoid family feuds, and party quarrels, and political campaigns, and

ecclesiastical conflicts, perhaps with some creed for a battle-cry. Nevertheless these things bring out what is worst, and not what is best in human nature. The old Adam is ever a fighter: he enjoys it, he drinks delight of battle with his peers. What an unregenerate satisfaction you feel in the thick of some tough contest; but when it is over, whether you have won or lost, too often you wake up to realise that the Ark has disappeared in the battle, the presence of God is gone.

Now this vanished grace can never be recaptured by any mere efforts of our own. As a rule, the Ark returns without our aid when we least expect it; and generally it comes back after we have left off fighting and are engrossed in simple, homely, commonplace duties. You hang up the sword and spear and you resume the sickle, and lo! the vanished Ark appears once more among the reapers in the corn-field, on the broad bosom of Nature herself.

If you have lost your secret consciousness of God's presence, you will not recover that blessing by striving or crying. It will return of its own accord, when you have settled down patiently and steadily to your plain, daily duty. Amid the trivial round and the common task, you will lift up your eyes, and behold! the vision of the Real Presence is granted you once more.

II.

Again, this text reminds us that the Ark was restored in the midst of harvest.

It stood revealed among the ripe sheaves. In our huge, modern cities, we live cut off from the sweet influence of the seasons. Amid the bricks of Babylon, men do not know how to spell harvest. Moreover, now that the whole world is made one vast corn-market, there is reaping and there is ingathering somewhere, all the year round. The bread which we break to-day comes from corn which ripened six months ago in Australia, or in the Argentine. And so our Harvest Festivals in September seem almost unreal. And yet, when we think more deeply, we discern how this very fact only spreads God's bounty, and should therefore spread our thanks-giving, over every month of the twelve. We ought to discern the Ark standing there among the corn-shocks all the year round. The vital energies of the seed and the soil, the miracle of growth and increase, the gift and grace and gladness of the harvest are not less marvellous, or less Divine, because God feeds His children by continually ripening the wheat in His perpetual summer which girdles the world. Notwithstanding steam-ploughs and steam-boats, we must still confess in wonder and gratitude—"Behold! all things come of Thee . . . Thou openest Thy

hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. . . . Day by day Thou givest us our daily bread."

To-day the yellow corn-fields are as instinct with Divine mercy and meaning as they were when Christ plucked the ripe ears and pointed to the sowers and the reapers in His parables. Listen:—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." The whole secret of sacrifice, the mysteries of redemption and resurrection, lie wrapped up in that prophecy spoken by our Lord in prospect of His own death, in sight of His own sepulchre. O blind-hearted man, with eyes too tearful to see the eternal Teacher in the harvest-field: "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die, and thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead."

III.

Once more, we may learn from this verse that we ought to recognise God in the midst of our success.

It is common enough for men to say with bated breath, in the midst of their afflictions and adversities: "Yes, it is the Lord's doing: I see God's hand in this loss, this sickness, this bereavement." That is true indeed, but it is not the total truth; God is in

the hail, and the blight, and the mildew, but He is not less certainly in the golden harvest as well. We may lift up our eyes as we bind the rich sheaves of our prosperity and our success, and rejoice to behold the Ark standing there. And, O believe me, we need this sense of the Real Presence most deeply when we are prospering and succeeding. Smitten souls and wounded hearts and broken lives creep home to their Father, and find Him by a kind of instinct in the dark. When you are ruined, you have no other refuge left except God. But when your business is most flourishing, when your name and fame are on the increase, when your treasures grow larger year by year, when you are reaping and garnering in the autumn fifty-fold of what you have sowed in the spring, then in the soft Indian summer of a prosperous career you stand in deadliest danger lest you grow proud and self-sufficient and forget your Maker; then, more than ever, you need to be steadied, and humbled, and kept faithful, by an abiding sense of the love and the fear of God. It was just after the best harvest he had ever known that a rich farmer said within himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years"—because he had forgotten duty and gratitude and judgment to come: he saw no Ark standing there among his thickest sheaves. Ah! friends, that is a sordid, miserable success which shuts out the heavenly vision, which sows and reaps and gathers into barns but is blind to the Ark with its Commandments and its mercy-seat. You cannot realise

God's presence? No, you never spare time to try. You go about with your face turned earthwards. You pore over your account-books. You grovel, absorbed in your profits. You stoop so low to get on. You bend your back to glean painfully, even among other men's sheaves. You never pause to take breath, and to lift up your eyes and look for the Ark.

God speaks a harvest-message to us all from this text. He says: *Lift up thine eyes and see.* His Real Presence is not far from any one of us. His awful shrine is within us—with the whispered word of duty and the mercy-seat of the great King. God's reality, God's claim, God's forgiveness—they are all waiting for us, in this very place, at this very hour, if we will only lift up our eyes.

THE DOUBLE JOY

By JAMES MOFFATT, D.D.

THE DOUBLE JOY

"And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth."—JOHN iv. 37.

WITH insight and ardour Jesus anticipates a rich harvest from the inhabitants of Samaria. His happy experience with one woman, who had shown herself unexpectedly susceptible to His message, made Him feel that the people must be ripe for the gospel, and He promises His disciples rich, immediate results of their new mission, although they themselves had done nothing in the way of preparing the ground or sowing the good seed of the Word. The fields were white to a spiritual harvest. "I am sending you," Christ tells his followers, "to reap what *you* did not sow. Other men have laboured, and you are entering into their labours." It is one instance and illustration, indeed, of the old harvest proverb: "One soweth, and another reapeth."

Sensitive as ever to the influences and suggestions of Nature, Jesus saw this truth as He watched the Samaritans streaming forth to Him through the corn-fields, which as yet were green. It was early summer. Harvest in Palestine did not fall until April, and it was during the month of December that

Jesus uttered these words. The wheat-fields spoke to Him of the growth He traced throughout human life itself: of the slow processes which ripen character and faith, and of the intervals between them, as well as of the strange inequalities which appear now and then to characterise the growth. For it is always felt as a mystery, and sometimes as a positive hardship, that one who has borne the burden and heat of a task should not enjoy, or even witness, the fruit of his long toil. Yet cases of this repeatedly occur. In many directions, such is the trying experience of men. Labour now and then seems to be lost, so far as the worker's personal credit or gain is concerned. Like the bee's honey, a man's efforts may go to enrich other people, who inherit or appropriate the outcome of his hard labour. Either he dies ere the fruits become visible, or, by some strange, vexatious shift of things, another wears the laurels, while he has had all the hardship and anxiety of the battle. Sometimes he may miss, in one way or another, the glory and the profit to which he seems legitimately entitled.

I.

"One soweth, and another reapeth." That is one of those old harvest proverbs, which leap to light, no matter where we turn in the affairs of men.

It is the inequality of things which stirs the irony

of the cynic. It is the fortune which has been observed in the career, for example, of a statesman like Sir Robert Peel. Peel had the faculty of stamping himself upon certain movements and measures in politics for which others were really responsible. On "almost all the great measures with which his name is associated," Mr Bagehot remarks, "on the corn-laws, on the currency, on the amelioration of the criminal code, on Catholic emancipation, he was not one of the earliest labourers or quickest converts. He did not bear the burden and heat of the day; other men laboured, and he entered into their labours." Occasionally, shrewd men thus take advantage of other people, it is true. The opportunist here finds his rôle. But more frequently this attitude is unconscious and inevitable. For one thing, it would seem that part of the world's gain must come repeatedly from people who are in advance of their age. Theirs it is to strike out fresh methods or ventilate new ideas; yet often, so far as regards credit, they are superseded by inferior men who, with less originality, possess the knack of exploiting such ideas and carrying them into practice. Columbus discovered America. But America is not named after Columbus. It is called after a later explorer. The pioneer must apparently yield now and then, in fame and name, to one who is able to put the last touch to what he finds already more than half completed, be it in science, or in politics, or in commerce, or in religion. In the glow of the harvest, the sower

is too apt to be forgotten, and his work ignored. Possibly he himself has passed away, leaving the effect of his work for other men to gather. Yet, in any case, he is apt to have less than justice done him in the hour of fruition.

II.

"One soweth, and another reapeth." It is, however, the consoling aspect of this truth to which our Lord seeks to direct the mind.

For there is something inevitable in this law of the harvest, and in everything that is inevitable or providential there must be something ennobling. The encouragement is this: that for sower as well as for reaper there is a joy, and a joy larger than purely personal success. Both contribute to a long, sure process. There is a slow continuity in Providence which links together the efforts of all who co-operate in a work, rendering each at once a dependent upon his predecessors and a contributor to posterity. Every man, with a life honourably and honestly spent, may know that he is putting a contribution, however tiny and minor, into the general progress of the race as that is contained within his sphere and circle. He has the consolation, nay, the exhilaration, of feeling that not only is he drawing upon the past but assisting to prepare a future which it may not be his lot to see. For the sacrifices and struggles of

each generation find their sanction and end in some wider purpose lying on ahead, and one age is the trustee for the next.

There is, no doubt, a touch of melancholy often in the moment when we realise that a large part of our work may not produce its harvest till after we are dead and gone. Fain would we see the outcome with our own eyes. Gladly would we take part in the gains as well as in the labour. But the magnanimous spirit rises eventually over such a natural weakness. The unselfish man will not suffer himself long to be depressed or paralysed by narrow considerations of this kind, preferring to reflect, as Christ suggests in our text, that God, the great Master of the world's harvests, couples him with the future as with the past, and that no life fails to be a cause as well as an effect, stretching forward into the morrow as it reaches back into the past. It is this outlook which, above all things, lends a certain grace and breadth to human life, investing it with something of the long, farsight and patience that belong to God Himself. It throws on our existence here a richer light than if we merely sought to explain it all from the dominating present that lies between the cradle and the grave. For as half of life's wisdom depends on the knowledge of how far our place and responsibility extend, and of the precise limits at which our function ceases to be of use, so the other half almost may be said to consist in the sight of a great, growing order in which each one of us has

some part of his own to play, some duty to discharge.

> "My brothers, 'neath the eternal Eyes
> One human joy shall touch the just—
> To know their spirits' heirs arise,
> And lift their purpose from the dust:
> The father's passion arms the son,
> And the great deed goes on, goes on."

It is the sum of that continuous process which is meant to form a sober exhilaration for us men in our work—"That both sower and reaper may rejoice together."

III.

Wise and becoming is it for every age to be reminded alike of its debt to the foregoing generation and of its responsibility to the next.

The one thought saves it from the selfishness of pride, the other from the selfishness of disappointment. Most of us, for example, are prone to take far too much credit to ourselves as a rule for a contemporary success or triumph. Any great religious or social movement, which reaps wide results at once, at any given epoch, is acutely conscious of its own powers and efforts. It is apt to be rather engrossed with them. The reaper's joy mounts warmly to the heart. And no doubt these efforts are most real. No harvest is gathered in

without heavy labour. The reform, or the revival, or the mission owes its success largely to genuine qualities of faith, and skill, and perseverance on the part of the agents who put in the sickle. Yet, what would the harvest be without the sower? And is it not only too easy to ignore or undervalue the past struggles and service of those who, by their patient prayers, and enthusiasm, and perseverance under unpopularity and obscurity, broke up the ground and started the long process of the harvest? In the case of prominent people, it may be less difficult to recognise the force of this consideration. We can see it writ large in the lives of those who write books or found institutions, or in any visible form leave works and witnesses behind them to impress posterity. But, remember, Christ's word is equally true of the numberless, nameless lives, which by their unostentatious faithfulness prepare every rising generation for its task. God's sowers include unrepresentative people. No drum is heard, no trumpet blown, when the sower goes to work. Quiet plodding is the mark of his vocation. And the success and strength of any age must go back, could we but realise it, to unhistorical characters, to men and women who made a conscience of doing sound work quietly, of foregoing applause; of making sacrifices, for example, on behalf of their children, and of denying themselves in many ways in order to let their charges or their offspring be fitted for the work of life. All such, in the home or

society, sow for the unseen. They labour for their successors. And, at the hour of harvest, whoever may forget them, God does not. "He that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together."

IV.

The parent and the teacher offer very conspicuous cases of this law.

For even when they live to see the success of child or pupil, the young person is often unconscious of the extent of his debt to these early influences, and his recognition of them must be at the best inadequate. As for the outside public, they scarcely trouble, except in rare instances, to consider the parents or the teachers of the man or woman whose life is enriching its age and circle. But Jesus knew better. He understood how to value the sower's work, for His own experience had taught Him already how loyally John the Baptist had sowed for Him, and borne the thankless labours of the spring. He was generous to John, and He would have us also generous to our predecessors, sensible that the very powers of thought and body which we exult to wield, and the very work we do with them in the Church and State, are sacred things—consecrated for us by the ungrudging sacrifice and forethought of the past. We ministers, especially, feel this, all through our work. Any success in a parish or congregation depends upon a

long previous train of influences which have set in motion the processes leading up to this ripe moment of the spiritual harvest. A new ministry begins and continues upon the labours of the old. And particularly when a young person joins the Church, or when some life is at last gathered in to the truth and service of God, this harvest proverb of Jesus recurs to the reflective mind. To outward appearance, the credit seems due to the evangelist or minister who puts in the sickle at the psychological moment. Yet his is but the last touch. Who sowed the seed whose grain we gather? Who put it in, long, long ago? We know, if we reflect for an instant, that such a change of heart really goes back to years of prayer and self-denial on the part of others, to teaching in the home and in the school, to loving and wise influences from hearts that may perhaps be cold below the sod to-day, and to voices that have long been hushed. "One has sown." All praise and honour to the sower's patience and sound work! The seed, no doubt, is God's. God's also is the growth. But the sower has his place. His faith and heroism alone have, humanly speaking, made that possible over which to-day we in the harvest-field rejoice.

That is one side of the truth. But when it falls to us to be the sowers, it is ours also to live with the same view of posterity, and still share this double joy. Sowing is far from an exhilarating task in itself. It is by no means so idyllic as reaping. It is no merry occupation of the warm afternoon. The sower has no

song, as the reaper has. With lips set, and shoulders strained, his whole air grave and toilsome, he plods below cold, wet skies, and over heavy fields, casting the venture of his seed upon the soil, and obliged to wait, ay, and to let it alone, till the slow warmth comes to swell the corn and fill the grain. How aptly does all that correspond to much of our influence upon one another! The riper the fruit, the longer seems the interval between the sowing and the reaping. For human souls cannot be rushed. Character may not be hurried. You must be content to labour slowly and ungrudgingly, in certain cases to wait for many years, even to produce a sensitiveness in some lives to the highest things of God. "Herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth." For the sensitiveness may not even be visible till you have passed elsewhere.

Jesus knew how nobly John the Baptist had seen his effort yield to another's success. Rising above all personal considerations and selfish hopes, John had been content to sow; he had been glad, in his magnanimous heart, to let another reap the harvest. What mattered that, so long as there was a harvest to be reaped, men and women blessed and gathered to their God! And so Christ bids us in our turn be brave and large enough to take our share of sowing in this world. He would have us put God's cause above our private credit, and think of posterity not as a time when our merits will be acknowledged and our wrongs righted, but as a season which requires our self-denial,

our strenuousness, and our economy to-day for its distant, finer growth.

> "Others, I doubt not, if not we,
> The issue of our toils shall see,
> Young children gather as their own
> The harvest that the dead have sown,
> The dead forgotten and unknown."

V.

For, every individual who allies himself with the cause of God, unselfishly labouring on behalf of his Church and generation, is truly a sower.

He benefits those who come after him as well as those who live round him. The effects of his influence are wider than he is conscious of, and last beyond his own existence in this world, through every life which he may have touched or moulded. "One soweth, and another reapeth." Yes, in the sphere of the most profound influences between man and man, quick returns are seldom possible. Our action on one another is not like rifle-shooting. You cannot tell at once whether you have hit or missed. The efforts of one generation only come out fully, for good as well as for evil, in the next. And hence it is that Christ bids us in these words of our harvest text consider that God has ever something growing and shaping itself to life eternal in this world of time, and that the honest and faithful life, which is unsparing of itself, is

sure to tell on others later on, who, conscious of it or not, will owe a large part of their strength and peace to the toil and foresight of to-day. Forgotten and unknown the dead may be, among the short memories of men, but God credits them eternally with their loyalty and labour. And even in life He opens to them the glad prospect of a future for which they are co-operating with Himself.

The other day I chanced to read, in the book of a great naturalist, these terse, brave words: "To reflect," the author wrote, "that another human being, if at a distance of ten thousand years, would enjoy one hour's more life, in the sense of fulness of life, in consequence of anything I had done in my little span, would be to me a peace of soul." Now, Richard Jefferies would hardly have called himself a Christian, in the common acceptation of the term; but surely these words of his are uncommonly Christian. It is to this very peace of soul, this generous joy of sacrifice, that our Lord invites us, telling us that in God's ripening providence no labour of faith can ever be thrown away, and warning us against becoming slack or sullen in the unrewarded sphere. Why fret at losing the credit of our work? Why be impatient and resentful at the lack of appreciation? Is not the Lord of the world's harvests using us somehow in the wide plan, allowing us to leave, by our courage and unselfishness, a rich deposit which will spring up after many days? And is it not our wisdom, as it will be our lasting peace and joy, to let our humble services

pass into the general life of men, as the sower drops his seed upon the earth, asking no immediate return or praise, but sure that the outcome of the bleak, present toil will be gained by some one some day, perhaps far off in autumns which we may not live to see? "Another reapeth"? Ah, what of that, so long as there is a harvest to be reaped! And God guarantees this. He assures us that no life, true to itself and to God's purpose for it, will be isolated or extinguished, but that in coming days its influence will be carried on and caught up to enrich posterity.

"One soweth, and another reapeth." *Jesus bids us, then, cast the seeds of prayer and honest service into our plot within the field of Time, that they may become fruitful unto life eternal.* For no sacrifice, however humble, no earnestness of life or purity of faith can be in vain. In ways we cannot anticipate, that will pass on to serve God's cause on earth, to create an atmosphere or a tradition of moral goodness, to gladden men in the future by its memory, to make life easier and stronger for some, to render faith perhaps more clear and simple for another in the long after-years. The thought of that is the sower's joy. And such a prospect Christ will open up to each of us, even as we are steadily conscious of our debt to the past and of our responsibility for the future. You, He would say to us—you, by your self-sacrifice and generous service, in bleak surroundings, are honoured by having a part in the great ripening process whose harvest may be far ahead. Be that

your noble peace of soul. Be that your spring of generous exhilaration. Sometimes it is your joy to reap as well as to sow. Sometimes you can see the ripe fruit of your work. But more often you must be content to foresee—to believe, in spite of all appearances, that your unostentatious, homely toil is needed, in some way, to aid the gains and growth of those who, in God's order, are to follow you, and who, without you, cannot be made perfect in their faith to God and in their work for men.

THE JOY OF HARVEST TIME

By W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

THE JOY OF HARVEST TIME

"Thou shalt keep the Feast of Tabernacles seven days."—DEUTERONOMY xvi. 13.

IN its provision for popular festivals and holidays and its arrangements for social enjoyments, Judaism exceeded any system of political economy known in history. God seems to have ordered everything to contribute to the comfort and happiness of the entire nation. Every successive season brought its period of relaxation from toil and its opportunity for recreation. Spring had its Passover Feast, summer its Pentecost, autumn its Feast of Tabernacles, and winter, the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple. Of these, the most joyous and enjoyable was the Feast of Tabernacles. It took place when naturally the hearts of the people were full of gladness and gratitude. The crops had all been stored, the fruits had been gathered, the vintage had been completed. Then the festive thanksgiving was commanded to be offered to the Lord for the renewal of the abundance of the harvest. But not this only, there was to be an annual celebration of the entrance of the Israelites into the Land of Promise. Therefore a seven days' feast

was instituted. It was inaugurated by the people carrying boughs of palm trees, and willows of the brook, and "the fruit of goodly trees." God commanded also that the people should leave their dwellings and live in booths, to remind them of the experiences of their fathers, who dwelt in tents and booths in the wilderness for forty years. During the seven days of the festival the people were to leave their houses. The booths or arbours where they sheltered were made picturesque with foliage of the choicest trees and with bunches or boughs of various fruits. In Jerusalem in later days the sight was peculiarly interesting. In the courts surrounding the houses, or on the roofs, in the courts of the temple, the street of the Water Gate, in the Gate of Ephraim, and on the surrounding hills, were booths, rudely constructed, where the people camped out during the holiday. It was a scene of simple, homely, festive enjoyment, sanctified by the offering of daily sacrifice and thanksgiving to the God of their fathers. The most detailed instructions were issued after the return from the Captivity of Babylon as to the size, the convenience, the height and ventilation of the booths, and the people had to eat, sleep, and pray in them. All persons had to reside in them save only the sick and their nurses, slaves or aliens, with infants recently born, and their mothers.

As time went on, the festival grew in extent and importance. There was a grand illumination with golden lamp-stands in the temple courts each

evening, the brightness of which lighted up the whole city. The people in the glow of the lamps danced together in religious thankfulness, and on the last day of the feast there was a golden bowl full of water from the pool of Siloam poured out at the altar of the burnt offering, while a stream of wine ran alongside of the stream of water in channels arranged for the purpose. This arrangement was spiritualised by Isaiah in the words, "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation"; and by the Saviour, as He watched the ceremony—"If any man thirst, let him come unto *Me* and drink." The sacrifices offered during the feast were varied and numerous, all being arranged to set forth the joy and thanksgiving of those who had been rescued from a state of shameful bondage in old times, and who had been blessed by the God of the nation with an abundant harvest.

It may be safely affirmed that almost every element of true happiness entered into the joy of the harvest as celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles by the people. Indeed, all Divine institutions have their final cause in the desire of God for the present and final blessedness of His creatures. Some of the elements which mingled in this joy may be briefly particularised.

I.

Fellowship. It was a great scene of social reunion.

Families long separated intermingled. Friend met friend. The social circle widened to all, as many came into contact in the festivities of the holiday. Religion from its very nature is promotive of good fellowship. It brings heart nearer to heart, and binds people in bands of love and social life. The family feeling was cultivated to an extreme extent among the Jews, and the genealogical line was preserved with the greatest care. But the festival carried the gregarious feeling beyond the family. Hospitality was exercised, and friendly interchanges gave new joy to the season, and thus brotherhood as a humane sentiment was developed and encouraged. All this was both a prelude and a symbol of the fellowship by which the Christian Church was to be characterised, and of the brotherhood which all believers were to enjoy with each other in Christ. In the first Christian Church fellowship, social life and brotherhood were established as essential elements of its life, and they have in varying degrees been preserved to this day. Churches have been happy and prosperous in proportion as they have cultivated a true religious communion among all their members, and to a large degree the existence of healthy churches depends upon the encouragement

of this Divine arrangement. In a delightful way was this sentiment preserved in the Jewish commonwealth by the great harvest festival.

II.

Unselfishness. Every occasion was used by God in the old dispensation to guard the people against penuriousness and selfishness.

Claims that both God and man had upon those who were largely blessed, had to be acknowledged and honoured. The command was given, "None shall appear before the Lord empty." A share of the portion of the harvest which came to each had to be offered to God, to acknowledge His direct providence in the new harvest, and that man might be saved from the shrivelling influence of the sentiment which leads a man to seek his own enrichment to the disregard of higher claims. This is a purely beneficent arrangement as regards man's own nature. Gifts from man to God can be no enrichment to Him, for He is the Creator and Lord of all things. But the law of offering to God a proportion of his possessions, saves a man from being self-centred and self-interested. It gives him a wider outlook and tenderer sympathies, it brings him into harmony with Divine purposes and noble ends. But there was not only to be a free and generous gift upon the Divine altar, but likewise a liberal hospitality to be exercised

towards the needy, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan; while the Levites, having no possessions of their own, were also thrown on the brotherly consideration of the people. This provision was a helpful one on both sides. It drew into the festival celebration many who would have been left in solitude and sorrow; it encouraged a spirit of humanity in the rich, and enriched them by so doing, even more than it enriched the recipients of a blessed hospitality.

III.

Religious Revival. This feast was made the opportunity of reviving a knowledge of God's Law and a religious spirit in the minds of the people.

In the early days of the nation it was difficult to keep a thorough knowledge of the Divine law alive in their hearts. There were few written copies of the law, there were no synagogues where the law could be regularly read and expounded, such as was the case after the return from Captivity, when Ezra instituted the order of the preacher and established synagogues throughout the land. Therefore, to compensate for the lack of such opportunities, it was commanded that this great festival should be made an occasion for reviving a knowledge of the Divine law in the nation, and of engaging in solemn religious services. The tendency in the people to relapse into idolatry and wickedness was thus

counteracted in a healthy and efficient way. There is nothing which preserves and strengthens a nation in virtue and righteousness so much as a knowledge of the Word of God. The advantages which Protestant nations possess over the nations of Popery are due to the freedom with which the Bible is circulated and used among them. It was a true religious instinct which led Ezra, when laying afresh the foundations of the nation after the Return from Babylon, to assemble the tribes in the restored capital city, and daily to read and expound the Divine law, until once more it had become impressed on their hearts. So there was a Divine philosophy in the arrangement that on this extended festival great gatherings for Divine worship should be held, and the law rung out in the hearing of all.

It was the joyous side of religion that was brought out in all the arrangements of this harvest festival. Therefore we are forcibly reminded of the Divine provision made in it and other festivals for

IV.

Relaxation. The Jewish system is wrongly regarded by many as a religion of gloom and sadness. Nothing can be more untrue than such a conclusion. Periods of recreation and relaxation were more common to the Jews than to any other ancient nation.

Even in the twentieth century, and in England,

there is no such provision made for general holiday-making as was provided for the Jews. The arrangements made for periodic opportunities of free, happy, social intercourse, for change of scene, rest from labour, and for innocent enjoyments of music and dancing, were far more exhilarating and helpful than the public games of the Greeks, with their tremendous excitements and sensual dissipation. Nor can the meagre bank holidays of England, conferring on the overtaxed labourers and employees only one day in each three months, be compared to this one festival of the Jews, when for seven days in the beautiful summer warmth and brightness they camped out, and had every form of true enjoyment, sanctified by occasional religious observance, and the whole crowned by an eighth day of special thanksgiving and joy. It is impossible for us fully to realise the happiness of such a time of recreation. There was a fine combination of pleasure in the journeys involved, the intercourse of relatives and congenial friends, the mingling in various forms of recreation, the strains of music and singing, the rural, simple life, the special religious observances, and the happy consciousness of the Divine favour. These all made the harvest time to be one anticipated with eagerness, and looked back upon with gladness. Thus it was demonstrated that the Happy God who presided over the entire nation fixed and arranged an economy of administration and observance which conserved the physical and

social, as well as the religious welfare of the people. All the festivals of the Jews overflowed with joy, but the joy of harvest was the most full of true gladness. As celebrating the providence of God in their wilderness life, and the possession of Canaan, as an expression of gratitude for the recurrence of an abundant harvest, every healthy emotion of the nature was evoked; and it differed far from our modern holidays, which are to a strange extent times of riot and dissipation. The people returned to their ordinary avocations better men and women for the interval of pleasure thus afforded them.

V.

It is impossible to close the subject of harvest joy without recalling the solemn and important references of the Lord Jesus to the great harvest at the end of time.

He said, "The field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, the harvest is the end of the world." Of this great final ingathering the exiled apostle in Patmos had a striking vision, when one like unto the Son of Man was seen, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. "Then an angel came from the temple, crying with a great voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is over-ripe.

And He that sat on the cloud cast His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped." May we not suppose that the happy harvest time of the Jews symbolised, as almost everything in their national life prefigured, great substantial realities in Christianity, the universal harvest when the meek, the holy, and the righteous will be gathered up into eternal blessedness, and triumph in the kingdom of the Christ, who shall be King of kings and Lord of lords? That will be to the risen saints a consummation of undying joy, and of unalloyed victory.

Let not the words of the apostle Paul be forgotten in connection with this subject. He gives expression to a truth of unvarying and positive application and fulfilment—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his own flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap eternal life."

"O holy, awful reaper,
Have mercy in the day
Thou puttest in the sickle,
And cast us not away."

THE HARVEST OF THE WASTED YEARS

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE HARVEST OF THE WASTED YEARS

"And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten."—JOEL ii. 25.

THIS book of Joel interprets itself. It is a graphic description of an awful scourge or calamity which had befallen the Jewish land. The country far and wide had been laid waste by swarms of locusts and other insects which had come in thick clouds, innumerable as the sand of the sea, and eaten up every green thing. The prophet speaks of them as an invading army, and again as a devouring fire. They had virtually licked up and consumed, as a fire does, everything that lay in their path, pasture and corn-fields, vine and fig tree, leaving nothing but bare desert and famine-stricken men and cattle. The destruction was complete. The accumulations of past harvests were swallowed up. The labour and the savings of years were reduced to nothingness. The work of half a lifetime vanished in a few days, and through all the villages and cities of Israel were heard the cry of the destitute and the wail of the dying. Joel takes this as the terrible burden and

background of his prophecy. He dwells upon the horrors of the scene, and then, as was the manner of all these prophets, he breaks into a song of hope. There comes to him a vision of brighter things, and on that dismally dark background he paints a picture of golden promise—prosperity, he says, will return as soon as the nation returns from its backsliding. The locusts have come at God's bidding to scourge the sins of the people, and they will come no more when the people are repentant and have their faces toward God. He sees the land once more covered with vines and olives, and smiling valleys and bounteous corn-fields, which will restore the waste that has been made. Golden summers and fruitful seasons, plenteous harvests and rejoicing homes will come again when the land is purged from its unrighteousness and idolatries. And he sums it all up in this figurative expression: "I will restore unto you the years that the locust hath eaten." And here, if we give the words a wider meaning, we may find some thoughts which are not inappropriate to the close of the harvest season. The text speaks of unproductive and wasted years, and then tells us of richer years which are to make up the waste.

I.

Destructive Years.

The year of which this prophet writes had not only been unproductive in itself, it had destroyed the labours of other years. All that had been left over of past harvests had disappeared before that all-devouring host. There are things like that in a nation's history. A year comes which swallows up many years. A sudden mania of speculation and gambling will spread ruin everywhere, and sweep away half the accumulations of thrift and industry. An unrighteous war will let loose hellish passions which undo the peace teachings of half a century, and every great war, just or unjust, consumes unproductively the toil of millions. Things happen sometimes in the religious world which are like a plague of locusts. The shameful fall, the detected hypocrisy of some man who has walked high in the Christian world, will make scores of unbelievers, and bring to nought a thousand earnest prayers. A church is sometimes thrown back a dozen years in one year. The spirits of mischief are busy. The influence of the baser sort prevails for a time, and dissensions arise and all uncharities. And prayers are choked and the good work stopped, and the spiritual fruits of years brought to waste.

Still more in the individual life; a man may lose morally and spiritually in one year—nay, in less than

a month—more than he has gained by years of teaching and prayer. There are far more disastrous and swift-wrought bankruptcies in the moral life than in the commercial — and men may consume their moral savings in far shorter time than they run through their fortunes. There are young men who have lost more this year than praying mothers gained for them in twenty years. There are young women who have let the Christian feeling go which twenty years had developed. There are business men who have parted with the integrity and the good conscience which were their inheritance from many generations. There are Christian people who have sold their bright religious certainties for the bitterness of the cynic and the gropings of the agnostic. And there are old people who have become old in spirit and temper, and lost all the hopefulness of youth, because they have virtually lost faith. For all these the year has been worse than a blank year. It has consumed the good of other years. And the prophet's words sum it up with painful emphasis: "The years which the locusts hath eaten." I trust that none of you have had the locusts doing their destructive and demoralising work.

II.

Further, there are years which in the truest sense may be called unproductive.

They yield no harvest of the kind which God recognises—no harvest of that kind which every good man is anxious to reap—you cannot look back upon them with any real satisfaction. So far as all that makes for a good and worthy life is concerned, they are barren years. So far as preparation for the final stock-taking is concerned, they are waste years, or, perhaps, rather worse than waste. They leave us with fleeting memories of a certain number of days and hours spent in various pleasure pursuits—and there is nothing very inspiring in these memories—possibly they leave us richer in goods, if we have been fairly fortunate and moderately industrious; but they have not made us in the slightest degree richer in those more precious things which abide with a man forever.

They are years of thoughtlessness or of low-thoughted care. They are years of frivolity and forgetfulness of God. They are years in which the innumerable frets and petty worries of life crowd and choke out all higher things. They are years in which coarse and vulgar ambitions occupy the whole field and leave no room for nobler pursuits and strivings. Or they are years in which sin and the devil have had full swing in your lives, and led

you whatever dance they pleased. These years would have a terrible stock-taking at the finish if we were honest enough to take stock in the light of God and of the Judgment Throne. What have you to set on the credit side of the sheet? Have you gained any of the experiences which make for wisdom? have you added to the knowledge which brings power and usefulness and wholesome influence? Have you thrown off one weakening habit, or overcome one besetting sin? Have you used any gift or talent in a generous and disinterested way? Have you won any human love by sweet self-denying services freely rendered? Are you yourself a better man or a worse than when the year opened? Have you made any little part of God's world happier and better for your presence in it? Are you, as Jesus said, richer toward God? It is on these lines that we have to reckon up the real harvest of each year.

Now I know that these questions could not be answered by any of us with entire satisfaction to himself. We have fallen far short, the best of us. We have been unprofitable servants. I remember that one of the most pious of the old Roman emperors, when he lay dying, said that there were only ten days of his life on which he could look back with entire satisfaction: the rest had been more or less wasted. It was a fine saying for a pagan. But if he had been a Christian, he would not have been satisfied with those ten days. The

best of us look back on the past with humbling and shame, and we should hardly dare to think of it all were it not for the Cross of atonement and God's covering mercy. But when one looks back upon the past or upon any single year in which human passions and human desires have had full play, with no distinct recognition of God, how barren it is! It is something like what Shakespeare says of life: "A walking shadow: a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"—that is what the years amount to in the end, when they have been lived without a serious purpose, without earnest thought and watching prayer. They are years which the locust hath eaten.

III.

And now we strike the final note in a higher key. I finish, as every prophet does and as every preacher should, with a promise of God—"I will restore to you the wasted years."

There is for all of us a breezy hopefulness in those words. We are often told of the irreparable past. And of course it is irreparable—we cannot recall it. We cannot live over again the wasted years. We cannot recall and use again the opportunities that were thrown away. Everyone knows that, and therefore it is vain to sigh and brood over

these things with doleful regrets. "It is no use crying over spilt milk," says the proverb. Of course not—crying will not gather up the milk into the pail again, white and sweet. That particular milk is done with. But we can say, "With God's help, we will not spill any more milk."

It would serve no purpose if we were to spend all the hours that remain of this particular year lying on our faces groaning and going back over all the neglects, omissions, and misdoings of the past. There is nothing inspiring in that. The best thing is to push them aside with one big thought of humbling and genuine repentance. Get them buried in God's sea of forgiveness, leave them behind us, and set our lives cheerily and hopefully towards better things. And that is always possible in a world which a forgiving Father rules, and in a world where a cross is set up as man's beacon light. "I will restore to you the years which the locust hath eaten." Of course, there could never come back to those impoverished Israelites the very corn and wine which the locust had consumed, but there would come a time of wondrous fertility, when kindly Nature would cover all the waste places again with grain and fruit. It is astonishing how soon kindly Nature repairs the desolations. There had been a long drought for years in Australia. It had changed thousands of square miles into desert. Millions of sheep had perished, hundreds of husbandmen had been ruined. Now the drought is broken.

Copious rains have fallen everywhere, and already the land is green, productive, prosperous, and teeming with the various wealth which bounteous harvests bring. And kindly Nature is only a symbol and parable of the larger grace of God. It is astonishing how soon a fruitless and wasted life can put on beauty and strength and usefulness when the drought of unbelief and sin is broken and the rains of heaven fall upon it. The poorest and unworthiest life, be it young or old, has yet time to become rich in goodness and faithful service, if it gives itself up to do God's will and receive the grace of Jesus. That is what the promise means for us—more or less for all of us. "I will restore to you the years which the locust hath eaten." I think, moreover, there will be a larger restoration for those who are walking in the light of the Lord to the things which lie far beyond.

Many things which the years have taken from us, especially if we are old, are waiting for us there, hid with Christ in God. Many beautiful things slip out of our lives as we pass along. The years devour them. Time hurries them away on its resistless stream. Death's scythe cuts them down. Youthful hopes go, and the joys of youth fade out, and the ambitions of doing something great and good, and friends and kindred and faces long loved pass away and leave us lonely, and then the very strength begins to ebb, and memory goes, and the eyes are dim, and wisdom itself fails, and few

things are left. Terrible is the waste which the years bring. Yet surely there is no final waste of these things, and God, as the poet says, keeps a place in heaven to hold them for us; and although He brake them to our faces and denied them to us for awhile, I know that we shall behold them all again, the dust swept from their beauty glorified. The gifts of God, says Paul, are without repentance. He gives beyond recall all the best things that He gives, and though we see them not for the moment, He only takes them away to return them in greater fullness. And so we interpret the words in that higher sense, "I will restore to you the years which the locust hath eaten."

AUTUMN TREES WITHOUT FRUIT

By JOHN G. TASKER, D.D.

AUTUMN TREES WITHOUT FRUIT

"Autumn trees without fruit."—JUDE 12 (R.V.).

IN the Revised Version of the New Testament the expressive phrase, "Autumn trees without fruit," takes the place of the obscure rendering, "Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit." Possibly the thought underlying this almost contradictory combination of terms is that of a tree yielding fruit that never comes to perfection, but remains on the boughs, shrivelled, good for nothing but to be burned. There is little difference between a tree that bears such fruit, and a tree that bears no fruit at all.

The new rendering is, however, a great gain. It presents, concisely and graphically, the main thought of the writer in words that cannot be misunderstood: "Autumn trees without fruit" are trees without fruit at the very time when they ought to be full of fruit. It has the further advantage of reproducing, in a yet more striking and suggestive form, the accurate translation of the older English versions, as, for example, Wyclif's "Harvest trees without fruit," and Cranmer's "Trees without fruit at the gathering time."

St Jude's words are a picturesque description of character. In his days such trees were growing in the innermost enclosure of the garden of the Lord. Within the Church were hypocrites who, by their ungodly and impure lives, were "denying the only Master, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 5, R.V. *marg.*). "These are they," he says, "who are hidden rocks in your love feasts, when they feast with you" (verse 12, R.V.): within the sheltered harbour there ought to be no need to look out for treacherous reefs, but these libertines were a source of danger in those select gatherings, where Christians were least likely to suspect any peril to their souls. Is it surprising that they should be branded as cumberers of the ground? that they should be described as "twice dead"—backsliders whose second state is worse than the first? and that their doom should be foreshadowed in the words, "plucked up by the roots"?

But there are "autumn trees without fruit" outside the Church as well as within its borders. This distinction may be disregarded as we remind ourselves that soon the one important question for us all will be, "What fruit?" On the one hand, it will be of no avail for the formalist to say, "I was a member of the Church many years"; or, "I was a preacher of the Gospel nearly as long." On the other hand, it will also be of no avail for the critic of Christians' shortcomings to say, "I never made any profession of religion at all." The test is: Am I glorifying God by bearing much fruit?

I.

The glory of the autumn is that it is *the fruit-bearing season*, when our eyes are gladdened by the sight of

> **"Vines with clustering branches growing,**
> **Plants with goodly burden bowing."**

Amidst the abounding autumnal increase, a fruitless tree in an orchard is an anomaly, a surprise. "What makes this tree to differ from its fellows?" is the question we involuntarily ask. Did the swift stroke of the lightning scorch out its life? Did it, in spring, put forth "the tender leaves of hope" and blossom, until there came "a frost, a killing frost" to nip its root? Did it flourish in the summer, and display fruit ripening in beauty, until there came a pelting, pitiless shower of hail to destroy all the fair promise? Did a swarm of tiny insects settle on the roots of the vine, so tiny that they seem insignificant, and yet they are able, by constant piercing of the roots, to stop the supplies of nourishment, without which the vine droops and dies?

Many other answers could be found to the question, Why has the tree no fruit in autumn? It would be easy to draw out the parable in detail, and to show how each reason finds an analogy in some fault of character. It is, however, more important to remind those whose lives are in the spring-time, that the teaching of this text is rather for them than for those

whose years are in the sear and yellow leaf. How often the tree is fruitless in autumn on account of some disaster that befel it in the spring or early summer! It is for the young to learn what are the conditions of fruitfulness; it is for them to be wise in time, and to "take the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards," when the "vineyards are in blossom" (Song of Songs, ii. 15).

II.

A twofold judgment must be passed on "autumn trees without fruit," whatever be the cause of their barrenness. Every such tree is both (1) a loss to its owner, and (2) a failure in itself. In both these respects it is a striking but sorrowful emblem of every human life that yields no fruit of praise to God and blessing unto men.

1. An autumn tree without fruit is *a grievous loss, a bitter disappointment to its owner.* The pathos of this simple thought comes home to anyone who has ever watched a Continental peasant proprietor gazing sorrowfully upon his empty vines. The dreaded grape-mildew has seized upon his little patch of vineyard, and blighted his hopes of partaking in the harvest joy. Perhaps he had carried the very soil itself up the steep hills which lead to the terraces where the vines are planted; certainly he had toiled

hard and long upon his vineyard, but hitherto he has toiled in hope. Now he knows that in vain has been all his painful labour, in vain his costly culture, in vain his patient waiting.

To the prophet Isaiah it was revealed that with like sorrow God looked upon Israel, His favoured vineyard. The Divine appeal sounds in our ears, and leaves us without excuse, if our lives are fruitless: "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (v. 4). Our vineyard is "planted in a very fruitful hill": this is true even of those who blame their surroundings and say that if only they could be transplanted, their fruit would abound. Granted that circumstances are not equally favourable to us, nevertheless the fact remains that all around us, as we complain of the poverty of the soil, are those who are no better placed, and yet are putting us to shame by the quality and the quantity of the fruit which adorns their lives. Around our vineyard, too, the Lord has placed a "fence" (v. 5). How great is the blessing of the fence! How much we owe to the gracious restraints of a Christian land, and of homes that are sanctified by the Word of God and by prayer! What a mercy that in the hour of temptation we are conscious that in doing wrong, we have to climb a fence, to do violence to some warning voice of love: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Prov. i. 10).

Our Lord speaks of another aspect of God's care

for His vineyard (John xv.), when, referring to the husbandman's close cutting of the vine in order that it may yield more grapes, He reminds His disciples that the sharp pruning knife is in His heavenly Father's hands. Of itself no branch can bear fruit, and only by means of the branches is the vine fruitful. The question, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" has a special significance for believers in Christ who are branches in the true Vine. It reminds them of the loving-kindness, as tender as it is faithful, which does not hesitate to prune the branch on which pride is blossoming, or on which over-abundant leafage is absorbing the sap required for the formation of fruit.

To us has come "the word of the truth," which is St Paul's definition of "the gospel" (Col. i. 5 f., *cf.* verse 10). The proof that we know "the grace of God in truth," is that in our hearts and lives it is "bearing fruit and increasing." Are we "bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God?" If not, let us remember that there is One to whom every fruitless life is a loss and a grief. He "delights to bless" the trees He Himself has planted, but He expects them in due season to "yield the fruits of righteousness." If He looks for fruit and finds none, the constancy of His love explains the depth of His sorrow. He has done all that love can do; He gave His Son to die for us, in order that we, "being made free from sin," might have our "fruit unto holiness" (Rom. vi. 22).

2. An autumn tree without fruit is also *a failure in itself*, inasmuch as the great purpose of its existence is unfulfilled. In the natural world the end of all God's working is that the earth may yield her increase. For this the earth revolves, the seasons change, the sun shines, and the showers fall. In the spiritual world the purpose alike of God's creating love and of His redeeming grace is to make our lives fruitful. Failure here is failure complete and disastrous:

> "Me Thou hast made to glorify,
> To know, and love, and live to Thee."

Christ's true disciples glorify God by bearing much fruit (John xv. 8), that is to say, they live to God as they live to serve and bless their fellow-men. St Paul does not hesitate to say that Jesus Christ "was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit to God" (Rom. vii. 4). Though it is not a strict exposition of the metaphor here employed, it is true to the apostle's deeper meaning, to say that He who died that we might be forgiven, rose again that we might be partakers of His life and be joined to Him in one spirit. Only those who are rooted in Christ receive the fullness of His Spirit, and grow up into Christ in all things. It is another aspect of the same truth upon which St Paul dwells, when he describes the Christian graces as "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. v. 22); and this teaching is the ultimate unfolding of all that is implied in the Divine message to Israel, "From Me is thy fruit found" (Hos. xiv. 8), and in Christ's pro-

found word to His disciples, "Apart from Me ye can do nothing" (John xv. 4).

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone."

III.

From a verse in St Jude's short epistle the conditions of fruitfulness may be learnt.

The change of a single word is warranted by the New Testament use of the two figures of a building and of a tree. The double metaphor "rooted and built up in Christ" (Col. ii. 7, *cf.* "rooted and grounded in love," Eph. iii. 17) teaches one truth by means of two different emblems. Therefore verse 20 may be read: "Ye, beloved, rooting yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God." On the securing of these three conditions our fruitfulness depends, and they are within the reach of all.

1. The roots of a tree need moisture and nourishment, also room to grow. One of the most dreaded forms of the grape-disease is said to be caused by exhaustion of the soil; the vigour of the vine is not maintained, and it is unable to resist the attacks of the parasite. From any like peril in the spiritual life they are saved whose souls are rooted in *truth*, the whole truth, even as truth is in Jesus. It has been

said that the secret of the abundant fruitfulness of the great vine at Hampton Court is that its roots are refreshed by the waters of the Thames. Whether this be so or not, it is certain that "the river of God," which is "full of water," may flow over the roots of our soul's life. The "goodly vine" was "planted in a good soil by many waters, that it might bring forth branches and that it might bear fruit" (Ezek. xvii. 8).

2. *Prayer* is an essential condition of fruitfulness, because He who ordained the laws of the spiritual universe has made to be contingent upon the ascending of our prayers the descending upon our souls of those showers of blessing without which the spiritual life soon droops and withers. Without rain the fruitful land quickly becomes a desert, and without Divine grace, and "the wisdom that cometh from above," our barren souls cannot bloom, nor "put forth fruits and flowers." In expounding the allegory of the vine, our Lord teaches us both that on the fruitfulness of our lives the efficacy of our prayers depends, and that on the answering of our prayers the fruitfulness of our lives depends. On the one hand (John xv. 16), to bear the fruit that abides, is the condition of receiving "whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name." On the other hand (v. 8), the Father is glorified in the answering of our prayers, and His purpose in fulfilling the desires of those who abide in Christ is that they may "bear much fruit."

3. Finally, to keep ourselves in *the love of God* is

essential to our bearing fruit that is ripe and sweet and mellow. To live in the sunshine of God's love is the only way of ensuring that "the fruit of our lips" and of our lives shall be fruit to be desired, not fruit more likely to set people's teeth on edge. Pleasant fruit is "the fruit of the light." Have we, in time past, borne "fruit" of which we are "now ashamed"? Then for us the gospel of grace has a message of which no whisper is heard in Nature. If we "bring forth fruit worthy of repentance," the renewing, regenerating grace of God shall "create our nature pure within," a miracle of grace shall be wrought in our hearts, and the thorn shall become a fruitful stock from which men shall gather grapes. To have our "fruit unto holiness," is to live the Christian life; that life begins when we are "made free from sin"; its end is "everlasting life" (Rom. vi. 22).

THANKFULNESS

By GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.

THANKFULNESS

"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."—1 THESSALONIANS v. 18.

THERE are many truths connected with a Harvest-Thanksgiving Sunday, but it is to the simplest and the most obvious truth of all that I wish to direct your thoughts at present—the duty of thankfulness, of praise. It may seem hardly necessary even to mention it, it is so inevitable, so clearly the outcome of the position in which we now find ourselves. And yet, when we think of it, can we honestly say that thankfulness occupies so large a place in our religious life as it ought? When we draw near to God, is it not principally with the voice of prayer and supplication—with the trying to get something from God, rather than the rendering to Him the offering of grateful hearts for what He has already done? It is easy to understand how this should be. We need so much. We are so sinful, so weak, so conscious of our own unworthiness in the sight of God, that it is natural that our attitude to Him should continually be that of suppliants asking for

the needed grace and strength. And yet we must be careful lest this attitude shuts out the equally necessary attitude of thankfulness and praise. The duty of thankfulness is a duty which God Himself has laid upon us: "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you," St Paul tells us in our text. It is a duty that has been hallowed for us by the example of our Lord Himself. "Having given thanks," we read, He distributed the loaves to the hungry multitude in the wilderness (John vi. 11); and similarly, at the institution of the Supper, "He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it" (Luke xxii. 19). It is a duty, moreover, which in our own hearts we cannot but feel to be both right and fitting, in view of the blessings with which on all sides God has surrounded us.

I.

Think of the bounties of God's Providence.

How numerous they are! What self-evident proofs of the loving-kindness and goodness of God! There is the sky above us, and the earth beneath our feet. There is the changing of the seasons, and the gracious promise that "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."

A modern preacher has told us a significant story of

a farmer whose fields lay on the slopes of the Cheviots. He was a man "careless, earth-bound, sordid." Early one spring morning he found himself alone in a hollow of the hills. "All the hedgerows were quick and green. All the birds were singing. Soft white clouds moved across the sky like a procession of dancing children." Suddenly a thought smote him: "Everything I see and hear is praising God—everything except *me*—I am not; I know not how." It was the seed of the kingdom that had fallen into his heart from heaven—

> "God taught his heart
> To bear its part
> And join the praise of Spring."[1]

And if that feeling of thankfulness was thus awakened in spring, when the earth contained, as yet, only the promise of the future, how should it be deepened in our minds to-day, as we think, not so much of work begun, as of work happily carried through and ended. God has "crowned the year with His goodness" (Ps. lxv. 11). And as we look around us at the well-filled cornyards, and think of the provision that has been made for man and for beast, the old exclamation of the Psalmist rises instinctively to our lips: "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (Ps. civ. 24).

And the feeling of thankfulness that is thus aroused in us by the seasons of the year is still further

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 37.

increased when we take a wider view of God's providence. What have we that does not come to us from God? "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." In all that concerns our natural, no less than our spiritual, lives we are dependent upon Him. And though, no doubt, there is a very true sense in which our prosperity and our advancement in the world are due to our own exertions, still it is to God in the last instance that we owe all. He is "the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning," from whom "every good gift" and "every perfect boon" cometh down (Jas. i. 17). And, consequently, He demands from us, as He is entitled to do, the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

In saying this I do not, of course, for a moment forget that this thankful spirit may not always be easy. In the struggle with poverty, in the sorrows and trials of life, which fall to the lot of some, it may be hard to find place for a feeling of thankfulness. Why, such ones may ask, are we not as happily circumstanced as others? Why should we be called upon to suffer, while they rejoice? It is but one form of the old question of the inequalities of life, the problem of the very existence of evil. We cannot dwell upon it now. But granting that there are inequalities, that there is suffering, are we not again and again met with some compensating privilege or blessing? Even in the darkest lot, some streak of light, the herald of the coming day, may be

found. "I am being taught," said one (Bishop Hannington) who triumphed over no ordinary difficulties, who never lost heart when most men would have despaired, "never to be disappointed, but *to praise.*"

Besides, are we sure that if we had all that we wish, that we should be the better of it, that we should even be as happy as we think we should? Is there not even a risk that the more we got, the more we should wish to have? It is by no means the universal, or even general, experience that it is the rich who are the most satisfied, or who get the greatest good out of life. The wisest prayer is still the humblest: "Give me neither poverty, nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me" (Prov. xxx. 8). And true and lasting peace of mind only comes to him who with the great Apostle can say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content" (Phil. iv. 11, R.V.).

"Some murmur—when their sky is clear
And wholly bright to view—
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue.
And some with thankful love are filled,
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy, gild
The darkness of their night."

Let us only strive to make the best of what we have: let us only look on the bright side even of our disappointments and failures—believing that they too will work together for good to them that love God:

and gradually we shall find that it is possible in *everything* to *give thanks.*

II.

In this attitude we are confirmed when, passing from the bounties of God's providence, we think of the exceeding riches of His grace.

The work of grace is God's work all through. It is begun, continued, and ended in God. When man sinned and fell, God might have left him in his estate of sin and misery: but instead, He sought in every way to bring him back to Himself, and at length in the greatness of His love spared not His own Son, that the work of Redemption might be complete. But not to dwell further upon that *unspeakable gift of love* itself, the very mention of which should evoke a spirit of thanksgiving in even the most callous heart, let us not forget how clearly and how freely the knowledge of that gift is brought within our reach.

We have *an open Bible.* That has come perhaps to be regarded so much as a matter of course, that it is difficult to imagine any other state of things. But read the story of any one struggling after light and life in the dark days of the Church, when the Bible was little else than a sealed book to the great mass of the people, and you will see what a difference it makes to possess God's Holy Word in a language

which everyone can understand, and in a form within the reach of all.

Or what, again, of *our weekly day of rest?* How great a boon that has proved to the masses of our working populations it is impossible to overestimate! While in the case of the spiritual life of the whole nation, no one surely can be blind to the disastrous consequences that would result if Sunday were as other days, if the work of the shop and the field, and the pleasures of social life and of sport never ceased, and there was no opportunity of meeting — as our fathers met—in God's house, for the solemn but grateful service of praise and prayer.

And so, once more, with these most convincing proofs of our Father's love—*the Sacraments of His Church.* Need I remind you how great is the privilege we enjoy when, surrounding Christ's Holy Table, already hallowed by so many sacred memories, we receive into our hands the Bread of Life? Is that for us no eucharist, no act of thanksgiving, for that is the literal meaning of the word? Or as we look forward to the new life in Christ to which it is summoning us, do we not hear again the old call: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him," that, "being made free from sin," and having "become servants to God," you may have "your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Col. iii. 17; Rom. vi. 22).

III.

Once more, we give God thanks for the promise not only of the life that now is, but also of the life that is to come.

When, again, can that be better illustrated than just on such a Sunday as this? In the corn of wheat dying that it may bring forth much fruit, we have one of the most striking examples that Nature affords of a life that is reached through death. And so in Christ, the risen Head of our Humanity, we are taught to see no solitary exception to the universal sway of death, but the "first-fruits of them that are asleep." HE it is who has "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel": and it is in view of this that as Christian believers we join in the glad ascription of praise: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And we have the more need to do this when we remember that, apart from the revelation of God in Christ, we have no clear knowledge of the future, no certain assurance that we shall meet again those whom we have lost.

A great essayist[1] has recalled an old legend which tells how a party of wanderers from the North and East, who were in search of the Eternal City, at

[1] R. L. Stevenson, *The Merry Men*, p. 78.

length met a very old man, shod with iron. The old man asked them whither they were going, and with one voice they made answer, "To the Eternal City." He looked upon them gravely. "I have sought it," he said, "over the most part of the world. Three such pairs of iron shoes, as now I carry on my feet, have I worn out in this pilgrimage, and now the fourth is growing slender under my steps. And all this while I have not found the city." And he turned and went his way alone, leaving them astonished. It is a striking expression of the anxious searching and yearning of men of old after the hereafter, of the dim and vain gropings by which they sought to realise the unseen and the eternal. But what was hidden from them is now known to the youngest child, under the Christian dispensation. As we sing, for example, the simple words of the hymn, "There is a happy land, far, far away," have you ever thought of their tremendous significance? They tell us that this life does not end all, but that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God." They bid those who are weary and heavy-laden now look forward to a time when "they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isa. li. 11). They comfort all bereaved hearts with the assurance that their departed friends are not dead, but gone before; that their eyes even now "see the King in His beauty," and "behold the land that is very far off" (Isa. xxxiii. 17).

Oh! there, surely, even were all other blessings

denied us—there, surely, is cause for thankfulness and joy. "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. . . . Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! . . . Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing" (Ps. cvii. 1, 21, 22).

Seek, then—this is the one outstanding lesson of our whole service to-day—seek in everything to give thanks. Recognise what great things the Lord has done for you, and render to Him the praise that is His due. And do so cheerfully, whole-heartedly. "Some people," says our great English poetess, "always sigh in thanking God."[1] The "thank God" falls with very little real meaning from their lips, and is a sigh of resignation rather than a song of joy. But the thankfulness which God desires is unrestrained, willing thankfulness, in the very uttering of which we not only gather its true blessing from the past, but are strengthened and encouraged for the future.

[1] E. B. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDENS

By GEORGE H. MORRISON, M.A.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDENS

"The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden."—GENESIS xi. 8.

"When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden."—JOHN xviii. 1.

"In the place where He was crucified there was a garden."—JOHN xix. 41.

THE meaning of Nature is very greatly deepened by the joys or by the sufferings of mankind. A place that is associated with some great experience can never be common or unclean again. We live our life in a world of hill and stream, and we strive or fall amid streets or fields or forests, until at length the ground on which we tread is ennobled or debased by what we are. There are scenes where we resisted sin and conquered it, and they shall always be beautiful to us, even in November. There are spots where we yielded—where we gave way and fell—and all the sunshine of July cannot make them fair. So gradually do we impress ourselves upon the outward world through which we move, and the glory of it is heightened or is lost by the kind of battle we are fighting. It is a great thing to know a little geology,

but there are other forces at work than geological. You have not exhausted the powers that are moulding Nature when you have talked of ice-sheets and of glaciers. By everything we do and all we are, we are reacting powerfully on our environment. Even the hawthorn has a more exquisite perfume, when we have scorned what is base and tried to play the man.

Now, it is notable that *the world's pristine happiness, and the deepest sorrow of all earthly history, are for ever associated with gardens.* In our modern life, if you wish the brightest and the darkest, the place that you naturally turn to is a city. But in the Bible, if you seek the brightest and the darkest, it is not to a city you turn, but to a garden. There are three great garden scenes in Scripture which may help to illustrate the truth of this.

First, the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. It is the Bible's picture of a golden age, when the music of heaven and earth was one great harmony. There was no sin then, nor was there any suffering; there was an exquisite and unutterable peace. And the birds as they sang cried, Goodwill, and the dew as it fell breathed plenty, and the leaves as they rustled whispered happiness, and the sun as it rose cried, Glory to God; and man, the epitome and crown of all creation, gazed, wondered, and was blessed in a garden.

Now let the ages roll by, and hearken to this:— "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth

with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into which He entered with His disciples." *Here* was the greatest agony in history, as in the other garden was the greatest happiness. Picture the darkness—the figure prostrate on the ground—the bloody sweat—the approaching noise and tumult; picture the glare of the torches and the flash of Peter's sword, and the kiss of Judas, and the base betrayal. In a garden man had been happy once: now in a garden Jesus was betrayed. The kiss of love has become the kiss of treachery. The dew of Eden has changed to the sweat of blood. The first Adam had been thrice blessed in a garden; but the soul of the Second Adam, in a garden, was sorrowful even unto death.

And then, a few days later, we read this:—"In the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus." The darkest tragedy of earth was over, and it ended where all earth's happiness began. Fresh from the hand of God, quivering with life, man had been placed in a garden at the first. Fresh from the Cross, with eyes that were sealed in death, the Son of Man was placed in a garden at the last. Somehow among the flowers a grave had opened, and there laid they Christ.

I.

Now, I think there is one great lesson in these stories. I do not think the scenes are accidental. God would have us learn that *where we have most enjoyed, there—in that very sphere—may we most suffer.* Tell me your Paradise, and I shall tell your Calvary. Tell me your Eden, and I shall know your Gethsemane. If the one is a garden planted towards the east, somehow the other shall be a garden too. For it is just where life has been most strong and rich—most full of the joy and peace and glory of the morning—it is just there, and in no other sphere, that the sweat as of blood is wrung from human brows. Your *home* is your garden, and you are happy there—and the lives around you are like tender plants—is it not just there that anxieties are bitterest, and that the sorrows fall which are too deep for words? Your *work* is your garden—a garden of the Lord—there is a glow and a zest and an inspiration in it; but when the hands are heavy and the grasshopper a burden, and you seem to strive in vain and make no progress, is it not just there, if you are in earnest at all, that the possibilities of misery are dreadful? Our darkest is always the shadow of our brightest. Where life has been richest and the sky most golden, that is the soil that shall be wet with blood. And there are men so hopelessly poor-spirited that they would rather miss the glory of their paradise, than take it,

as God always gives it to us, with the shadow of Gethsemane upon it.

II.

And that leads me to another thought: *In the place where He was crucified there was a garden.* There is something very suggestive in the way in which the Evangelist introduces that. In the place where He was born there was a manger—what a world of comfort that has brought to men! In the place where He was tempted was a wilderness—it is the right environment for that lone struggle. But in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and John knew that it was always so. What was the Cross? It was the last great act of the Saviour's obedience to His Father's will. It was the final deed of self-sacrificing love; it was the crowning of a life of loyal service: we mean all that when we say that He was crucified—and in the place where He was crucified there was a garden. Do you understand that? Do you grasp God's parable? Does it not tell us how *all the flowers will blossom if we take the road that leads by Calvary?* It is a mysterious and a shadowed world, but *that* is a fact which there is no gainsaying. In the place where we sin there never is a garden—or if there is, we are turned out of it. In the place where we live selfishly and poorly there is never any beauty or any fragrance. But when we quietly take the Saviour's road, when we deliberately

give our lives for others, when we say, "God helping us, we shall lift up our arm for the rights that need assistance, for the wrongs that need resistance," then do we fear lest life be grey and joyless—when, lo! in the place of crucifixion is a garden?

Here is a young man, let me say, whose father was never much of a success. And the father is getting old and is out of work now, and the son's wage is not a princely one. It would be very easy to forget the old man: are there not institutions for the aged poor? And life is so short, and youth flies by so quickly, and living is so expensive in the city. There are always excuses for not doing things. But the young man I think of is of another calibre. A father is still a father, though he was once a drunkard. And the son stints himself and husbands every penny, and practises self-denials that no one dreams of; and not the least part of his burden is his certainty that those who do not know his secret think him mean. But all the time how his character is deepening! How resolute and strong and manly he is growing! And when the end comes and the father's eyes are closed, how the son can look the whole world in the face and say, "Thank God, I did my duty." There are few joys in all the world like that. He took up his cross daily and in silence. His common life was the place where self was crucified. But he understands now, as he looks back upon it all, that in the place where he was crucified there was a garden.

III.

But there is one other contrast that at once suggests itself in these two gardens. When man had fallen, and when his eyes had been opened, there was heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, and Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of God among the garden trees. That is the one picture; man has fallen, and he is hiding from the Almighty's presence. And now it is the Resurrection morning, and it is still early—the sun has not risen yet; and to the garden where the body of Christ was laid come Mary Magdalene and John and Peter. Whom are they looking for? Why all this eager searching? "They have taken away my Lord," cries one of them, "and I know not where they have laid Him." The fact is that they are searching for the Master whom Adam and Eve in paradise had shunned. Was Peter sinless, then? Was Mary immaculate? They were children of frailty, tarnished and soiled with sin, yet *in the one garden, long ago, the man and the woman had hid themselves from God; and in this garden, on the Resurrection morning, the man and the woman come hurrying to seek Him.*

Now, what does that tell me? Why, it tells me this, that *a gospel had come whose secret and power is love.* Had I never found the word love in the gospel, this garden scene alone would prove it there. You who are mothers, why do you start and hurry at the

slightest crying of your little child? You are drawn from any company to their bedside, and you are drawn because you love them so. And men are drawn over a thousand miles of sea to fight for the country and the homes they love. Now add to that, that in the early morning Mary and Peter were *drawn* to the side of Christ. Fear would not do that; reverence would not do it. They could not help but run, because they loved Him. Some men are buried with much pomp and ceremony, and being buried are straightway forgotten. And the grass grows rank upon them, and in the deep-cut letters that tell the idle wind of fifty virtues, the lichen and the moss root undisturbed. They may have been feared, they may even have been honoured, but they sleep unvisited because they were not loved. But others, though dead, still draw the living to them. They were loved —that is the mystery. And to-morrow, out of the din and bustle of the streets, one shall be drawn to this sepulchre and one to that—the graves are different, but the love is one. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," *there* is the drawing power of the gospel. Thank God! the grave is empty and the Christ is risen, and to be drawn is to be lifted heavenward.

I remember, some years ago, going over Hampton Court Palace with intense delight. And when we came to the gardens, there was pointed out to us a vine—I think of the kind which is called the Black Hamburg vine—and this one vine, year after year,

amazed everybody by the abundance of its grapes. The yield was extraordinary: nothing was known like it: no one could understand its splendid harvest, until at last it was discovered that its roots had reached to the flowing waters of the Thames. It is a great thing to enjoy Christian privileges. It is sweet to be in the garden of the Lord. But the secret of harvest, and of all that makes life rich, is that the roots should be dipping in that living water which flows so near us wherever we are set, but which rises among the everlasting hills.

HARVEST AND THE KINGDOM

By CHARLES BROWN

HARVEST AND THE KINGDOM

"And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."—MARK iv. 26-29.

THIS is our Thanksgiving Day. For our material mercies we gather to render thanks. We have brought into this house emblems of the things for which we give thanks, that they may help us to realise that God is the giver, and that we may connect all natural processes with Him. We whose lot is cast in the neighbourhood of cities suffer much, we are almost divorced from Nature ; we do not see the waving golden cornfield, the laden fruit-tree, and the stages by which both come to be. The most obvious things to us often are the labour and skill of man. We think of his enterprise and cleverness. We miss the mystery of the early morning, the wonder of the new-born day, the splendour of the sunset, the wonder of sprouting and growing things. We are far removed from those primary processes which

are at the base of our very existence, and we need some serious effort to get into the spirit of the old inspired song. "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

It is well for us that, once a year at least, we remember the goodness of God in temporal mercies, and go over again the familiar ground, gleaning in the harvest field.

There are two things to be remembered as justification for appointing a day of thanksgiving for the fruit of field and garden and orchard. (1) *That on this our existence here depends.* All other labour in the world rests on the labour of the farmer. He is the one man we cannot exist without. You don't think of it, but it is true, that the farmer and the despised farm labourer are about the only people necessary to our existence. There are other arts and crafts that we should greatly miss if they disappeared. But if the farmer disappeared, the race would disappear also. All our schemes would come to nothing, if God cursed the earth with barrenness—if the clouds ceased to operate and the rain and dew to fall—manufacturing, building, mining, engineering, the work of the artist and musician, poet and scientist, are all made possible by the cultivation of the soil and the blessing of God upon it.

(2) The other thing that comes to me with force as I read this passage, is *the fact that our Master*

loved the country. By far the greater part of His illustrations are taken from it. He has little to say of the city and its ways. The corn, the fisherman, the vineyard, the sheep and their shepherd, the hen with her chickens, the sparrows and the other birds, the flowers and grass of the field in their wild beauty, the fig-tree and the vine, how He loved to dwell on them! and what lessons He found in them! How His teaching, when He was thirty years of age, reveals His observation during all the quiet years. He has very little to say about other arts or crafts. I am free to confess to a little surprise that He has nothing to say of His own. He draws no picture of the carpenter at his bench. He mentions once or twice the builder; He goes so far into the city as to speak of the children playing in the market-place. He seems most at home, however, where there is no roof but the sky, out in the open air, watching, learning, teaching, the ways of God to men. So He teaches us this morning. We follow Him into the fields. He shows us a man at work, striding over the field with the seed-bag slung over his shoulder in front of him, his arm keeping pace with his step as he casts the grain on the land, and He says, *There is an image of the kingdom of God.* We should probably not have thought of it, apart from Him. This is not the first and only time that He says it. Over and again He reverts to the figure, one of the commonest sights in the land, with nothing to teach him whose eyes are not opened. A common

man doing common work—the Master says of him and his occupation, "They are an image of the highest," *so is the kingdom of God.*

Now let us place the two things side by side, and see what lessons come to us.

What is the kingdom of God? *The reign of God in the soul of man; a society of people who own and submit to the authority of God*—to extend the kingdom of God—to bring men to His feet. To set it up in commerce, in social and political life, is to get His will done, to get men to crown Jesus Lord of all; and He says, this man striding through his field is like the kingdom of God. He does not furnish us with all the meaning of the kingdom, but certainly with some part. And it is well to observe that He does not tell us all about the man. We see him sowing, but we know that before he has sown he has ploughed and cleaned the land. Anybody travelling through our own country now, who will take the trouble to look about him, will see that men are busy ploughing up the cleared harvest field, that ploughing will be followed by harrowing and cleaning, and it will be over soft and prepared soil that the feet of the sower will go. Our Master *does* tell us something else. He says that when the man has committed the seed to the ground, he sleeps and rises night and day, which means that he goes about his duties, not meddling with the corn, not poking at it to see if it is sprouting. There are some things he *can* do, he can fence the land in which the corn is

sown, he can drain it, he can weed it, he can keep the birds off it, but he can't make the seed grow. That is God's work, and he doesn't know how it is done. Nobody knows. That is God's secret. All the skill and cleverness of the world cannot do it, nor quite explain how it is done: the wonderful, the mysterious part belongs to Nature; the obvious, the comprehensible part belongs to man. So is the kingdom of *God*. Then what is it?

I.

The mingling of the human and the Divine, the co-operation of the power that is in man and the power that lies beyond him.

The man has the seed, he never produced it. He has the soil, he never created it. He can dress and prepare it. He must bring seed and soil together, and the miracle of its multiplication will be wrought. How, he cannot tell—how a grain of wheat will produce from thirty to sixty grains, why they produce wheat and not barley, why sixty rather than ten; how it grows after a certain pattern and then stops growing, and begins to ripen, he knoweth not. He only knows that his father and grandfather before him, the people all about him, have done the same thing and are doing it, and the results have come—seed has sprung up—blade, ear, full corn, ripeness, all there. *So is the kingdom of God.* The blending

and mingling of Divine and human. For the spread of the kingdom among men, there has ever been and ever must be, the co-operation of man with God.

You have that in the production of the Bible. It is God's word and man's: man exercised mind and brain and thought on the being of God, the origin of the world, the mystery of sin, and *revelation came.* But there would never have been a *Bible* apart from human effort, *nor a Christian Church.* One has never heard of the springing up of a church without human labour, certainly not in New Testament times. The same is true of conversion, "Go ye; and lo, I am with you." The earth automatically bringeth forth fruit of herself; but after man has sown, the earth does not sow itself. The earth says most plainly to man, you must meet my demand if I am to serve you. You must obey a law if it is to serve you. It is a most threadbare commonplace that in Nature man must labour and risk if he is to profit. Cultivating, planting, tending, reaping, all speak of work.

So is the kingdom of God. So is it in moral and spiritual matters. If men will not work, and work in accordance with the laws of God, then society—human life—will bear a bitter crop of crime and trouble. Let there be a general neglect of religion, desecration of the Sabbath, neglect of the family altar, neglect of the restraint and discipline of religion in the home, unwillingness on the part of Christian people to take pains and trouble concerning the untrained young life, and the result will be hooliganism,

vice and crime, defiance of the law of God and man, the slow ruin and sure wreck of the nation's life.

I verily believe that it is the will of God to save men by means of His Church, but it can never be done without the Church's labour and sacrifice—alert, seasonable, self-sacrificing labour. Perhaps the whole of the Church's methods of labour needs to be remodelled, but certainly the cry is for *labourers*—not officials, not men with a hobby, but self-forgetting labourers, on fire with zeal, informed with wisdom, who have the work of the *kingdom* laid on their hearts. The harvest truly is plenteous—the *labourers* are few.

For example, you and I who preach and teach have no seed to sow unless we work for it. The Bible will only yield up its secrets to men who will toil. We must face spiritual struggles if we would help struggling men's souls; and perhaps, my brethren, perhaps the painful experiences through which we are brought are designed in the wisdom of God to furnish us with seed which we may sow in the lives of others. No one knows what the books that comfort and help you cost their authors, through what travail of soul and sweat as of drops of blood their authors have passed to produce them.

Think of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In his *Grace Abounding* he tells us that he thought he had committed the unpardonable sin, and went to a minister who told him *he thought he had*. He had no better seed to sow upon that broken heart than that,

because his own nature had never been broken. So no man will be likely to have anything to say above the level of a platitude which helps nobody, unless he will labour with brain and hand and heart, and even *suffer* to obtain it.

Moreover there must be some labour bestowed on the soil in which we sow. I do not believe that Sabbaths and sanctuaries are the kingdom of God, but I do believe them to be of inestimable value to the kingdom.

The words which I say in this place, and which make some impression, would make none beyond that of annoying people, if spoken on the Stock Exchange. There are times and places in the lives of people when they literally cannot think of spiritual things, the duties of the moment claim their entire thought, and it is an inestimable advantage to have times and seasons and places where you are free to concentrate your whole energy on spiritual things.

So the money and labour we spend on the erection of buildings is as the cultivation of the soil. A teacher who can get children in quiet has them at great advantage, and sows his seed in the best possible conditions.

One feels that we must spend labour on the soil that is not sowing. Kindly interest in people, the rooting up of evils, providing better dwellings—all may be preparation of the soil. It would be a most lamentable thing if people should be *satisfied* with

that, or if, having done that, there were then no seed to sow. But the man who has the seed will not be slow to welcome and appreciate all that makes for the best conditions of sowing.

The second part which man has to play is that of patience and trust. There is the farmer, "sleeping and rising night and day," *i.e.*, not consuming himself with worry by night, and rising early in the morning to poke into the soil to see whether the seed is sprouting. He sows it, and though he thinks lovingly about it, he leaves it to Nature and to God.

It is necessary for us to transfer this thought into the spiritual sphere. We want the enterprise of the farmer, and more, we want his patience, "Behold the husbandman *waiteth* for the fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it." Probably the danger of worrying about the kingdom is not acute with most of us. This is the danger. "If I do this, prepare this soil, sow this seed, what will come of it?"

And this, "I have given my uttermost and best, and now, what has come of it? No impression has been made, no life is made better." You don't know, and you must be willing to leave it. If after I have preached a sermon with earnestness and pleading in it, nobody shows a sign, no one stands up nor comes to my vestry, nor writes me a letter, do I say, *No good has come.* I dare not. Even if nothing had come or ever would come, I would be bound to sow the best seed I have. I suggest this morning that along with eager activity we must cultivate the grace

of patience. Remember the phases to be passed through, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

You can manufacture flowers and fruit of a sort. You can force blossoms before their proper season. You may force confession from people in over-eagerness for results, to swell a statistical list, and they may be like those gorgeous plants brought to your door, grown to sell, and not to last in an ordinary atmosphere. I have no right to say, because people do not join the Church, and use certain phrases, that they are not religious. No right to say a work of grace has not been wrought, because of the peculiar temper manifested or view held. A man may be a true Christian and a very unripe Christian. There may be fruit in a crude and hard state, sadly needing sunshine. There is nothing we need more, when we have done our best, than patience with the work of the Lord in the souls of men.

II.

For there is the Divine side to this paragraph.

"The earth bringeth forth of *herself*, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." With all that process man has nothing to do. He stands by and watches; the uttermost he can do is to pull up the weeds and fence the field. And no one knows how the process is accomplished entirely. So there

is the mystery of the Divine work in and for man. You cannot explain the *relation of the death of Christ to the forgiveness of sins*. How the telling of a simple story results in the changing of life. How men wide apart in time and space have the same hopes, desires, purposes, faith. After all, brethren, when you think to-day of corn culture or fruit culture, you conclude the part man plays is very small. Nature does everything with the seed. So that from the earliest time the occupation of the farmer has brought him near to the Creator, and the fruits of the land have seemed to be His gifts.

So is the kingdom of God. *You can do much*, and you must do what you can: build churches, gather children, speak the truth, instil good principles. Then just as the farmer says, "Everything depends on the season," you say, "*Everything* depends on the Spirit of God." The main thing is out of my hands now, and when the fruit comes, I can't take the credit for producing it. All the newest agricultural machinery won't make corn grow or ripen. It can sow and reap, and bind and thresh, but the vital part belongs to God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." There is comfort in this. It limits my power, it limits also my responsibility. I am bound to consider why my work doesn't succeed, to inquire into my defects, but my actual responsibility is to do the best I know, and leave the result with God. I can only cast my seed on the ground, live my life, speak my

word, etc. Influences far beyond my control beat upon the lives of those whom I seek to influence. I have prayed and wrought, and I feel that beyond all there is the sovereignty of God and the will of the individual. God must take His own way of germinating, developing, ripening. Through retribution, suffering and sorrow, the buried and hidden seed may be brought to the harvest, and I must go on sowing and leave the rest to God.

But we may be assured, brethren, that labour—well-directed labour—will not be in vain in the Lord. I think of that Divine life of service, and death of sacrifice cast upon the apparently barren soil of a scoffing and thankless world, and bearing fruit to-day in millions of lives in every land. And I learn that the chief thing in life is for me to seek to know the will of God, His great law, and by His strength to live and labour. To keep near Him with obedient heart, and to do with all my might what I can (and it is such a little); and then rest in the Lord and wait for the manifestation of His power, and when it is put forth, to be ready to act again in the reaping of the harvest. There has been some amount of discussion as to who is the reaper in this parable; surely the same as the sower, and surely, therefore, there is such work as reaping in the kingdom to be done. What do you mean by reaping? Partly this. You may see when somebody is impressed, when the mood is softened, when the careless one has become thoughtful. There are

times when you should try to reap, to gather into the Church the results of long labour, Christian profession, Christian decision. The Lord's labourer should watch for such times, and not let them slip by, lest the fruit be sacrificed by delay.

You cannot tell *how it comes*, you may tell *when*. You cannot perform the creating work, nor trace the footmarks of the Spirit in His ways of working in the heart of man. You can see the fruit, and you should try to gather it. You should watch for the weeds. You should watch for the ripening. You should welcome the first sign of good, and seek to gather it in. Where you are sure love for Christ is, you should urge its confession. Where people are wavering, you should seek to bring them to decision, and so to gather in in its appointed time the harvest of the Lord.

SPRING-TIME AND CHILDREN

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

SPRING-TIME AND CHILDREN

"Thou renewest the face of the earth."—PSALM civ. 30.

THIS psalm was written, as its words show, in the spring-time. It speaks of the tender grass sprouting after the rains, and the trees putting forth their young verdure, and the birds building their nests. It speaks of the slumbering forces of God, shut down during the hard winter-time, awaking, shaking themselves from the dust, coming out of their prison-house and going forth with power, to fling over all the earth the grace and splendour of young fresh life. "Thou renewest the face of the earth."

We also are in the spring-time. We have it present before us in more ways than one. It is outside the sanctuary. We have seen it as we came hither in the glorious new green that paints the meadows, and the flowers and blossoms peeping forth everywhere; and we have heard the birds singing, as the Psalmist heard them three thousand years ago. And now inside the sanctuary we see another spring-time, better than the one outside, with more poetry in it, and more promise, and sweeter music than birds ever sang. We are with the children. We have all

this glad young life about us, fresh from the creating hands of God. And where that is, there always is the world's spring-time. I suppose that is the reason that the Sunday-school anniversaries are always kept in the month of May or thereabout—nearly always. I have known them kept in autumn or winter, but they have seemed unnatural, untimely, things born out of due season. We keep them best when the world is putting on its young face again, and the flowers appear upon the earth, and all things are gay with hope, and bursting with promise. For the children are always to our eyes and to our hearts what spring-time is to the world of Nature; and whether we think of one or the other, we may say as the Psalmist wrote, "Thou renewest the face of the earth." I want to speak to you on the lines thus suggested, in my brief talk this morning, about *spring-time and the children*, and if I get them mixed up you will not mind. They are so much akin to each other that they will well bear mixing, without harm to either or to ourselves.

I.

This may be said of both, that God's spring-time is always welcome.

Perhaps it is that we are getting somewhat weary ourselves, and therefore like to see things which have no touch of weariness, but have all the dewy fresh-

ness of the morning; or, possibly, it is because we still preserve, hidden away under the weight of years, some of the romance and sentiments of life's dawning. Certainly there are two things which always bring us gladness if we are healthy-souled people; and these two things are, the bloom of spring-time and the glory of young life. Every year we await with more impatience and hail with more satisfaction the coming of this season. I cannot speak for every one of you, but I can speak for most of you and myself. Never do I see the meadows renewing their green carpet, and the bare trees putting on their new suits, and the flowers rising in myriads from the dead soil; and never do I hear the birds cooing love-songs to their mates, without sentiments of profounder worship and emotions of deeper joy than those which I felt of old. These things do not become less lovely and inviting as we grow in years. The eye sees more and the heart feels more of God's sweet workmanship. Every returning spring-time deepens our appreciation of His works, every spring-time fills us with a gratitude beyond words. The glory grows, the splendour has more meaning, the world becomes a bonnier world. Every year the freshness of it all suggests more refined and thankful joy. And young thoughts make our minds like a newly furnished palace as we look abroad and say, "Thou renewest the face of the earth."

And equally welcome to us, nay more welcome, is that other spring-time which is always renewing the

face of humanity, the spring-time of young life which keeps the world from growing old and stale and profitless. I cannot even imagine a good man who is not made happier by the presence of young life, who does not feel that the world is made new to him by the sight of young faces. He is a melancholy old pessimist, or a weary and jaundiced hypochondriac, or a jaded and corrupt old sinner, or an unfeeling mummy with a heart dead as a stone, if he does not feel some touches of joy and hopefulness at the sound of young voices. It is the peculiar glory of the world that there is an everlasting succession of happy young life coming on to pour fresh blood into the sluggish veins of humanity, and set its heart beating again with the hopefulness which is God's best gift. The heaviest crime which He could lay upon us would be to keep us living on for ever in a world in which no new life was seen, to let the race grow older and older without sending young faces to brighten its weary visions and remind it of its own childhood. We should get mad enough to devour each other at last, if the children did not come to keep us sane and fill us with gentler thoughts.

"Ah! what would the world be to us,
If the children were no more?
We should dread the desert behind us
Worse than the dark before.

"What the leaves are to the forest,
With light and air for food,
Ere their sweet and tender juices
Are hardened into wood—

"That to the world are children ;
Through them it feels the glow
Of a brighter and sunnier climate
Than reaches the trunks below.'

They give us something to work for when we are tired of working for ourselves. They re-people our world with new hopes when all the dear old hopes we cherished are dead. They make us believe in God again when the sorrows of life would have made us faithless ; and they help to keep us in the better way for *their* sakes, when if we thought only of ourselves we might drift into the evil way. There is always something missing and something dreary when young life is not found in association with riper years. A company of old Christians without the glory clouds of youth and maidens, is like a sad sunset with no promising of morning. A church without a Sunday school, is a decaying oak with all its strength and glory in the past, or like a burial place of saints. A congregation without vigorous young life in it, is a house with Ichabod written on its portals. A city without boys and girls playing in the streets of it, is hardly better than a city of the dead ; and a kingdom ruled by old men who have become pessimists as well as old, will fall to pieces unless God sends into its councils new and hopeful blood. Thank God above all things for the human spring-time which never fails, which never will fail until the Almighty grows weary of His own creation. It is young life that makes life worth living for all. "Thou renewest the face of the earth."

II.

We think both of spring-time and of young life as a promise of better things.

They are both prophetic. They speak of something more precious than themselves. They are, or ought to be, the womb of the future out of which a gladder and richer day will come to birth. We all feel that, first, as we greet with gladness the vernal season, as we watch the early buddings, and catch the scent of the early flowers. These things are beautiful enough in themselves, but almost unconsciously we look beyond them. They seem to carry our thoughts by anticipation into the fuller glories and riches of summer. They are earnests of what will be, foretastes of the ripe fruit and bounteous wealth which we shall gather when spring-time has brought out the fullness that is hidden in it. And so we try to think, and so we ought to think, of the young life which is sent to us. It brings gladness to us for what it is, and still more for the promise we read in it. If we thought that there would be no healthy fruit bearing, no moral and spiritual summer, following on all this innocent and joyous spring-time; if we thought that these children would develop in evil ways, and disappoint the hearts which have prayed and toiled for them; if we thought that all or most of our young men and maidens were just sowing for themselves wild oats and weeds in this preparation time, and

were going to lose the goodness which they now know and hold, we should have no pleasure in beholding them. It is because we see in them prophetic visions of a nobler kind, that our eyes rest upon them with satisfaction. Is there not a feeling in all our hearts that the coming generation will be better than the generations of the past and the generation which is now passing away? That hope springs eternal in the human breast. Fathers and mothers always believe that there ought to be and must be a good time for the children, happier and more fruitful in goodness and joy than they themselves have known. It is difficult to believe that it will be just a repetition of the old, old story of sin and weariness and disappointment; that human life is just a circle which ever returns into the self-same spot, and that as it was in the beginning, so it is now, and ever shall be, world without end. We instinctively think that the children whom we are training up for manhood will somehow escape the old ruts and strike out on somewhat higher paths. And we think that, because God wishes us to think it. He sends the young life uncorrupted from His hands, with all blessed possibilities in it, that He may renew the face of the earth, that humanity may have another chance, that each generation may improve on the old stock, and that His great and loving purpose concerning the race may ripen into fulfilment.

And surely that purpose is being slowly carried out—at least in lands which are truly Christian, in

lands where the Bible is known, where praying homes abound, where Sunday-schools flourish at every turn, where children are trained in the atmosphere of sanctuaries. There each generation is brought a little further towards the perfect day. It is not so in other lands. There is no forward movement there. The promise which youth brings with it from God is always blighted and disappointed. Instead of the fathers come up the children, and the children are as much like the fathers as one field of nettles and tares is like another. The old, old story of sin and weariness and corruption is for ever and for ever repeated. There is no betterment. There is no improvement of the race. God is ever sending the fresh young life, only to see it degenerate and run to the weary old waste, just as it has done for hundreds of years before. Humanity makes no permanent advance at all, save where it kneels at the feet of God, and sees Him in the face of Jesus, and is nourished by His Spirit of truth.

But here, where Christ is at work and religious influences always operating, God does slowly renew the face of the earth. The human family moves on slowly to better things. Each generation is a little happier than the one which went before. The race learns more of goodness, more of the law of kindness, more of pity and more of brotherhood, more sobriety and cleanness of life, more of the fear of God and more of the things that make for peace; and the children coming on will have a better chance of a

healthier, sweeter, nobler life than their fathers had, if God will only give them grace to use it.

I would fain look forward, then, to the future of all the young life which is in our presence to-day, just as one looks forward to the summer coming after the spring-time. I look forward, not without some trembling and tearful emotion, and many an anxious prayer. For the world is full of temptations, and some of these may fall from all their early promise into the blight and waste of sin. But I look forward with hopefulness too, knowing that God has put into their hearts some knowledge of His truth, that their young lips have learned to sing the name of Jesus, and that if they hold fast to what they have been taught, their lives will grow into a beauty of goodness which is even better than the beauty of childhood.

But there will be no summer for them further on, and no summer for the young men and maidens here further on, unless they take the ways and hold to the ways which the Master has shown them. Young life never realises the sweet promise of youth unless it grows in the way of righteousness and prayer; and children are never happier than their fathers and mothers were, unless they learn to serve God more dutifully and love Him more earnestly than their fathers did. God help us who are older to keep this ever before them. God make our sons and daughters an improvement on the old stock. May we see them shaping in a way that makes us proud of their lives,

and a little ashamed that we have been so far behind. God grant that all our children may ripen in the sunlight of His love into the fruitfulness of a blessed summer, so that in them we may truly say, "Thou renewest the face of the earth."

FLAGS

By ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

FLAGS

"And she laid it in the flags by the river's brink."—EXODUS ii. 3.

"IN the flags by the river's brink!" That was a strange resting-place for a baby! It must have been a terrible fear which so far conquered a mother's care for her little one as to lead her to run this risk. The stream might have carried the ark out to sea, or a crocodile might have made a meal of the child. But Jochebed placed her babe there in faith. The tall bulrushes were to be his sentinels, and the flags nodded him a welcome—and he would be protected by God, for he was to become the greatest leader and lawgiver of a people who would do more than any other for the religious life of the world.

The River Nile kept many secrets, and among them its own source for many centuries, though explorers risked their lives to discover it. Every year it brought from the highlands, many miles away, the soil which made Lower Egypt the granary of the world; but it never bore a greater blessing than was in the ark of bulrushes. The river was worshipped under the sacred name Hapee-Mu, and

was represented by a statue crowned with water-plants, as a sign that the prosperity of the land was dependent on the produce of the river; but never did it serve a nobler purpose than when it received, amid its reeds, the child who was destined to ennoble human history.

In those days the Nile was very different from what it is to-day, for it did not flow through a desert, with a few miserable houses here and there on its banks. Palaces stood there, surpassing those of England—marble terraces and stairs lined the banks, beside which the Thames embankment would appear paltry. Lovely gardens were to be seen, in which nobles walked with their attendant slaves behind them; and in stately temples and palaces were walls exquisitely painted with historical pictures. On the river itself were pleasure galleys and little papyrus skiffs, in which citizens went out with bows and arrows to shoot the abundant waterfowl. No wonder that Jochebed hid her child among the flags, lest as an outcast Hebrew babe he should be killed.

It is not, however, of the child who grew to be the greatest man of his age that I wish to speak, nor yet of the faith of his parents who thus cast him on the care of God, nor of the strange Providence which led the daughter of the great Egyptian king to become the child's deliverer and protectress. We will confine our thoughts to *the flags which sheltered this chosen child.*

Two sorts of rare plants are alluded to here. The "bulrushes" which grew then abundantly in the river, were of great use to the people. From them were made, not only this little ark, or cradle, but boats, like those referred to in Isaiah xviii. 2, and shoes, and baskets, and not least "paper," a word which is derived from *Papyrus Nilotica.*

But I am to speak about the "flag," *Alga Nilotica*, which grew freely by the river-side, and was the representative of various flowers we know, especially the common yellow flags which grow in our English streams. When out boating on the Thames, I have often seen its golden head gleaming above the forget-me-nots, and nestling among the taller reeds. And I have noticed how the river steals in where a boat cannot make its way, nourishing the flags and flowers, and reminding one of the everlasting stream of tenderness and love so near to us that we live on its brink, and by means of its influence.

This common flower, used by Divine providence for a high purpose, and mentioned in the sacred record, may teach something to those who have heeded the words of the greatest Teacher—"Consider the lilies of the field."

It is well that Bible illustrations are within reach of children and people of ordinary abilities. They were evidently not meant merely for clever folk who fancy they know everything, nor for those only who have a wide experience of life, or are remarkable for their exceptional talent. They are brought

down to the mental level of those who find it hard to learn their lessons, and who are not more thought of by the world as yet than are the flags hidden amid the taller rushes; but who may yet be reached by Divine grace, as the flags are by the stream, and may thus fulfil some purpose beyond human expectation, as these flags hid the ark in which the infant Moses lay asleep.

We are glad of this, because most of us are ordinary people. We are not represented by a rare exotic which puzzles and delights a botanist, but by flowers whose roots are in common soil, and whose life is nourished by a river free to us all. Nor can there be about us either growth or beauty, except as we receive influence from above—for all the rushes and reeds would soon die if the stream ceased to pour down from the unseen lakes far away among the hills. All the vegetation of earth depends ultimately on the blessings which fall from heaven, and we should lie spiritually dead, but for the river which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. If, therefore, our spiritual life is drooping, we may well put up the prayer of quaint George Herbert:

"My stock lies dead, and no increase
Doth my dull husbandry improve:
O let Thy graces without cease
Drop from above.

Thy dew doth every morning fall;
And shall the dew outstrip Thy dove?
The dew, for which grass cannot call,
Drop from above."

I.

It may be well to notice that there are several varieties of flags.

They grow in similar places, and bear the same general name, yet are unlike each other; just as it is among us.

1. For example, there is the *Iris fœtidissima, the stinking flag.* It grows in the south of England, and has leaves of a livid purple colour, which, if you touch, leave a disagreeable smell on your hands.

There are characters like it. Even boys and girls may emit an evil influence which poisons the moral atmosphere around them. One, perhaps, will tell a lie without hesitation or a blush of shame; indeed will openly boast that he has got off so well by means of his deceit. Some utter bad words, and are delighted if they can shock one who is innocent by impure talk—"Children who are corrupters" are they. Others may have sullen or spiteful tempers, which bring misery to those around them, aye, and to themselves also. If any such are found in the family or in the school, in the warehouse or in the office, they ought to be rebuked, and to be avoided. Yet even these may have their nature changed (as the flag cannot do), if the earnest prayer rises up to the Redeemer of souls, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

2. Happily there are also to be found *flags which*

are both pretty and fragrant. Such, for example, is the *Persian Iris.* We try to cultivate it, are pleased to see it, and like it the more the nearer we are to it.

Doubtless we all know some who are so loving and gentle, so pure and sweet, that we are delighted to be with them. They are too truthful to shuffle or deceive, and too self-controlled to be easily provoked. When they are near us, work becomes pleasant, discord ceases, and home life is sweetened and softened as if an angel from a better world had visited us. They are not without faults, but by living in the atmosphere which prayer creates, they themselves grow in grace, and do much to conquer evil in others too. A story is told in some book for children, of a terrible giant who used to torture and kill all he met, through sheer fiendishness. Many a brave knight tried to rid the land of him, but they all failed. Then one, younger than them all, offered to make the attempt, and set out for the ogre's castle. On his way a fairy met him, who bade him lay aside both sword and armour, which he was very loath to do. Instead of these, he was to carry as his only weapons some sweet-scented lilies which she gave him, saying, "Take these, and when the giant meets you, fling one of the flowers in his path or against his breast." He went on thus armed in faith. By and by he saw his dreadful adversary, who rushed forward to slay him, raising his enormous club, which no sword could have parried, and no

armour withstood. Instantly the boy-hero flung a flower, over which the giant stumbled; but coming on again more savagely than before, another flower was flung, which struck him full in the face, and away the ogre fled in terror. It is an old legend, and no doubt it was meant to teach us the lesson we have in the book of Proverbs, "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." If some one in ill-temper, or moved by envy or revenge, attacks you, and threatens your happiness or your reputation, you may overcome evil with good if, instead of answering railing for railing, and giving blow for blow, you speak brave and loving words, as the Lord Jesus would do. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

II.

The fact that flags grow "by the river's brink," is also suggestive.

That is where God meant them to live, and where He has provided for their life. The bulrushes protect them, the soft, deep soil beneath holds and nourishes them, and the stream creeps in to feed and refresh them. Every flower, indeed, has its appointed environment, and if we would cultivate them successfully, we must learn what that is, and surround them with it. We cannot alter God's laws, but must

adapt ourselves to them, if we would succeed in anything. If we planted a rose in the mud of a river, it would die; or if we set a river flag in hot sandy soil, it would quickly fade.

If God so clothe the grass of the field, if He so cares and provides for the lower forms of life, much more is His hand over us for good; because we are His children, redeemed by His Son. And in many ways He has provided for us, although we are slow to recognise that it is His provision, and imagine that by some happy chance, or by the choice of parents, or by our own strong wills, we are where and what we are. But it was God who gave us the home in which we were shielded, provided for and trained; while the school where we received instruction was not of our choice. Even now when we are older, however adverse our environment may seem to be, we can still take of the water of life freely, and then we shall resemble the flag, which will not die whether in breezy corner or in shady nook, if only it keeps in touch with the stream.

III.

But it is not enough to have advantages, unless we absorb them.

Many people are none the better for their special privileges. A man may possess a whole library of the best books, but unless he knows something more

than their backs and their titles, he is not so well informed as the lad or girl who only has a little row of well-read books, by the best authors. So in the higher sphere we must drink in spiritual good from books, and worship, and teachers. If we would truly live, indeed if we have within us the life of the Spirit, we shall be able to transmute what is evil into good, and shall never be deceived about its nature. It is like the drinking-flask the late Lord Sherbrooke had, which once belonged to the Sultan of Mysore. Any poisonous fluid put into it (so the legend ran), would at once effervesce, and thus revealed, could be flung away. Far more truly does prayer prove a test of good and evil. Anything we can ask God's blessing on will be powerless to harm us.

IV.

The humble flags we have been thinking of have their uses.

Orris root, or iris root, once used as a stimulant in pharmacy, is still used in perfumery, and a tincture of it is sold as essence of violets, whose fragrance is beautiful.

Now there are none who cannot live a fragrant life by God's grace, even though it may not be public. The child who rebukes evil by quiet remonstrance, the little hero who defends from ill-treatment one who is weak, the man pressed by

business who yet finds time to help and advise one in difficulties, the wife and mother who makes her home a sanctuary for the children, are all serving the Master in heaven, who rejoices to recognise in such acts a fragrance more refreshing than that of hidden violets.

In order to do this, we must remember that our Christian life has no self-sustaining power. But the Spirit of God is round us, and near us, as our inspiration, if only we are responsive to it, and drink in His silent influence. For silent it is. No one can hear it, though they may be close by us when we receive it. This holy influence is not like a noisy babbling stream which tumbles over the rocks with rush and roar, but like the quiet river which gently kisses the banks, and creeps softly among the rushes, and makes its way to the hidden flowers that nestle among them. But in that sense also we must "stoop down, and drink, and live."

V.

In bringing these thoughts to a conclusion, I wish to allude to

Two Uses of Flags

one of which seems to suggest what is specially *suitable to girls*, and the other what is *suitable to boys*, though neither of these is confined to the one or

the other; for a girl is often brave, and a boy is often gentle.

1. We have spoken of the flag more than once by its more classical name, the "Iris," which reminds us of a legend. Iris, in Greek lore, was the rainbow which is flung on clouds during a downfall of rain, as an emblem of hope and a promise for the future. And Iris, the daughter of Thaumas and Electra, was the messenger of the gods, sent to lead souls up to heaven, and into the mysteries of the future life. She was spoken of as the "youthful, winged virgin." But what was a dream may be a reality. Each one may be a heavenly messenger, speaking of hope, bridging over the gulf between earth and heaven, as the rainbow does, directing the thoughts of others upward, and fulfilling the words of an inspired prophet, "A little child shall lead them." Many a Christian maiden is a God-sent Iris.

2. But the flags have another special lesson for us all, though it may be particularly suitable to lads. The flags were represented in the fleur-de-lis of France, which long ago was blazoned in the escutcheon of England. That emblem has fluttered in many a fight. Round it the tide of battle has raged, and there has retreated or advanced. Brave hands have upheld it in the face of the foe, till it has led its followers to victory. Then let us, in the momentous moral conflict of life, pray for help and

inspiration, that we may be brave, and loyal, and victorious over evil; rejoicing that as we follow our Leader, others may be encouraged to follow us.

"A noble army, men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light arrayed:
They climbed the steep ascent of heaven,
Through peril, toil, and pain;
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train."

THE SACRIFICIAL SYMBOLISM OF NATURE

By THOMAS G. SELBY

THE SACRIFICIAL SYMBOLISM OF NATURE

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."—JOHN xii. 24, 25.

THE foreglow of Gentile homage which shone upon the opening life of the Divine babe in Bethlehem revives, for a moment, when the hunted Teacher of Nazareth is within a day or two of His death. "And there were certain Greeks among them that came to worship at the feast; the same, therefore, came to Philip and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus." The first sign of homage from outlying lands could not fail to stir within the heart of the Virgin Mother a hope for the speedy enthronement of her Child, over a kingdom wider than Solomon's; and this second tribute of the Gentile world to His greatness and destiny perhaps produced a similar impression upon the minds of the disciples. He would surely reach His mysterious destiny by some other pathway than that of the cross. The fast-fading hope of a new theocracy which should include Greek,

Roman, and Scythian, flashes up for a moment within their hearts. For such vainglorious dreams they have been chided in the past with a severity they cannot forget, and they do not now dare to speak out the thought which seems an obvious inference from this new incident. After taking counsel together, they agree to tell their plain story to Jesus, and leave Him to take up at His discretion the absorbing subject suggested by the event. "Philip cometh and telleth Andrew, and Andrew and Philip tell Jesus." The Master at once fixes upon the motive which has coloured the narrative of the group, and, as though approving the thought of the disciples, and endorsing their forecast, exclaims, "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." But though this was true, it was not true in the sense the disciples had conceived. The Master's exaltation to the right hand of power was an idea which needed to be limited and defined. The great triumph must come through suffering. The hour of His destiny was culminating to noonday splendour, because the hour of pain and incomparable sacrifice was at hand. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." To guard against all misapprehension, the truth is reaffirmed in a later part of the same conversation. The falling of the seed into the earth prefigures the same tragedy as the lifting up "from the earth" of verse 32, and the "much fruit" corresponds to the drawing of "all men" unto Him there spoken of.

Jesus found types of His own redemptive work not only in the Temple, where the animal victim was placed upon the altar, but in the sowing and reaping of the corn-fields. The seed cast into the furrow gave up its life to ensure the blessed increase of the harvest. Perhaps such metaphors appealed more vividly to those who were just emerging from a crude, primitive culture than they do to us. Every object in Nature was endowed with a soul. The classical nations of the world saw the struggle of mythological heroes in the changes of the year, and life was ever being born anew from death. The tree which rises in front of the barbarian village is "a tree of life," and gives its virtues to the crops of the surrounding fields. In those parts of the world where the fall of the leaf takes place year by year, the magic virtue is conveyed through the death of the mystic tree. Amongst some of the nations of Europe, when the last load of corn is brought home, the branch of a tree is placed on the top of it, and in the following year is replaced by a new branch, to which, perhaps, vitalising virtue was once attached. Students of comparative religion connect the custom with the story of the priest-king of Diana, who lived in a sacred grove by Lake Nemo. He held his office by force, against all comers, and when he became old and decrepit, his place was taken by a man who, having challenged him by breaking off a branch from the sacred tree, had overpowered and slain him in combat. Probably this priest-king symbolised in his person the alternations

of life and death seen in the growth and decay of plants and trees. The weird and savage superstition, a mixture of poetic legend and bloody heathen worship, sets forth that all new life arises through the death of the old. No ethical element entered into the story, and the idea of life yielding up itself to create new life, never entered into those old pagan dreams. We do not know whether Jesus had heard of these superstitions and their symbolisms in His childhood. A finer similitude of sacrifice presents itself to His thought—that of the corn of wheat which meekly surrenders itself to the strong hand of the sower who plants it, to produce the yield of harvest. The life which Jesus gave for the salvation of the world was not snatched from Him when He was on the verge of decrepitude. He was as passive in the hands of the Father, whose redeeming counsels He had come to fulfil, as is the seed-corn in the hand of the husbandman. Jesus looks upon the grain of wheat which submits to die, and nourishes a new plant from its own substance, and sees there a picture of His vicarious death. From His self-surrender, spiritual harvests of incalculable grandeur shall arise and be nourished by the very substance of His own life into conformity to His type.

In the first of these verses, the great Teacher indicates the need there is for His own vicarious death; and in the second, He asserts a practical principle which must have its place in the lives of His followers, a principle which borrows its crowning

sanction and its energising motive from His own death.

I.

Jesus affirms a necessary connection between His own death and the triumph of His cause: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone."

"Much fruit." The metaphor points to the vast discipleship which shall yet gather round His person, and respond to the spirit of His matchless life. Jesus did not desire a nominal discipleship, however influential and widely extended. He had no worldly ambitions, and it would have been little satisfaction to Him if every member of the uncounted human family should enter His school and be called by His name, whilst, at the same time, remaining unchanged in essential characteristics. There must be moral oneness, the sense of a common life, participation in the same great experience. The discipleship must reflect Himself. No superficial view of the doctrine of the Atonement is taught by this similitude. Release from a sentence of condemnation which left the follower void of Christ-like characteristics, is not here thought of. Those who share in the redemptive secret of Christ's death, must reach thereby the qualities of the great Lord and Pattern of men, and be like Him, as the corn in the harvest-ear is like that dropped into the furrow.

Jesus Christ is here presented to us before His system had a history, or even a completed foundation, laying down the conditions and gauging the scale of future success. In this suggestive figure He tells us that to give currency to His words, to reproduce His tender and gracious acts in all lands, to guide an undivided race into the secret of His fellowship with the Father, He must die.

Up to this point in His career, He had been little more than the Teacher and Pattern of His disciples, and the Friend of the multitudes who flocked to His side.

At the core of this holy life there was the great germ-principle of fellowship with the Father. The disciples had looked from time to time with simple amazement upon the significant outward signs of it. It was so unlike anything they had been able to touch in the routine of their unspiritual service and assiduous prayers. He lived as much and as vividly with the Father as with the disciples, and the assurance of the love with which He had been loved before the foundation of the world, was as throbbing and as sensible a reality as the human affection which pervaded the homes where their childhood had been nurtured. Every stir and turn and fresh ripple in the course of common life seemed to bring from the dim depths of this mysterious personality new notes of praise, trust, and adoring love, as the swell of the wind in the spring-time brings to the ear far-away songs of birds from the recesses of the forests. Here was the

pattern-fellowship of the human spirit with the Divine. How could the disciples, saved from their sin, be made to share it? His teaching led men into the roots of His own spiritual fellowship, and set forth the moral laws which determined all intercourse with God, and upon which His own intimate, conscious, and unfailing unity of life with God was based. Little by little, as the disciples were able to absorb it, the truth He spake had been shaping itself into a large, growing, and perfect beauty. Such lofty precepts had issued from His lips as no preceding prophet had ventured to announce, and had been slowly asserting their sanctions over His hearers; and a new view of God began to unfold itself as He addressed Himself to men. These precepts were to be the law, and these doctrines the creed of the new world, a law and a creed surely attested from within, and a part of the deeper life of the soul. The service of His generation was an ever active and concrete embodiment of all He felt in His acts of fellowship with the Father. As the result of this communion, what a vital outpouring of meekness and mercy, truth and righteousness, in His daily dealings with friends and neighbours! And these strange qualities, brought from the Eternal Source of all life and virtue, were to enter into His disciples and stamp them with the Christ-like image. The spiritual perfection of Jesus the Son was an anticipation of the future of mankind, as well as a reflection of His own exalted and heaven-rapt consciousness. Here was the seed

of a munificent spiritual harvest, which should yet appear in the after-days.

But the vital processes by which these high elements were to be lodged within human nature and multiplied into fruitful exercise were but half revealed, and in no sense understood. The corn of wheat was present to the view, but it was single and alone, an ethical phenomenon not only rare but in a category by itself, fruitless in the full sense in the hearts of the most intimate and attached disciples. How could this system of truth be made to germinate amongst men? How could this unexampled fashion of life be made to possess humanity at large with its high motives and its celestial energy? How could Jew and Greek alike be made to participate in that spiritual fellowship which was the ruling note of Christ's personality and message? How could Jesus Himself be formed in the hearts of men—a new essence in their tempers and a new force and splendour in their ideals? How could He succeed in the world —succeed in His complete plans and in His own interpretation of the term? The question was not how far the Prophet could make Himself talked about, by what method he could write a page in human history brilliant with a holier romance than all other pages, how far He could enchain the after-generations and enlist their passionate veneration for His name. The problem which absorbed Him was, how far He could put the assimilating spirit of His own life into all the countless forms and phases of life that should

yet flourish upon the earth? His redemptive counsels could only be consummated in making men like Himself. To this question, which is the unspoken transition-thought between verses 23 and 24, Jesus replies that only upon one condition—that of the perfect sacrificial surrender of His very personality—can He become more than an honoured and impressive name in history, a quickening power in human souls.

Upon what final fact does the force of this necessity rest? It has been said that death softens the prejudices against which a man has to contend in his lifetime. When uttering these words Jesus knew that He would be judged with more fairness and impartiality after His death. The pathos of mortal suffering makes its appeal to the multitude. The suggestion may be true, but is no key to the meaning of this majestic utterance. Nor is Jesus bringing into His reckoning the popular enthusiasm for martyrs. An official censor at the Court of Peking some years ago penned an indictment of the present dynasty and its counsellors, placed the document in the fold of his robe, and committed suicide. From the Eastern standpoint that was a patriotic and heroic method of giving point to his warnings. But it was no such idea Jesus had in His mind when He spoke these memorable words. His thought goes down to the deepest philosophy of salvation.

1. *This saying does not directly raise the abstract question of the nature or necessity of a redemptive*

sacrifice, but it implies the human mind is so constituted that some such doctrine is a primary demand in any system which aims at deep and world-wide success. For anything the text directly asserts, it may be an imperfect view of the Divine character which has created this want in the human mind; the doubts and fears to be dispelled by that reconciliation through sacrifice for which the heart cries may be suggested by the dark analogies of man's own vindictiveness, or it may be an ethical sense in human nature that must be conciliated by some scheme of vicarious satisfaction; but the unresting need is there, and Jesus implies that His life-work will be fruitless unless He respond to it in the tragic crisis at hand. He does not immediately treat of the character of God, but He implies that an atonement is necessary to success with men.

Does not this assertion justify itself in the light of all the centuries which have sped since it was first spoken?

Representative teachers and law-makers of the great nations have sometimes ignored the question of sin. Their message has been, "Begin to do right just where you are, and let the past take care of itself. Perhaps Nature will provide a remedy, or the haunting phantom will disappear with years and growing intelligence." If men think the past insignificant, and make light of the specific forgiveness of its offences under the solemn and august forms of law, the probability is they will meet the future and

its temptations in the same light-hearted temper. Conscience, like those curiously fashioned insects which have many-faceted eyes, looking backwards as well as forwards, has a retrospective function as well as a function which deals with the present and future, and unless violently blinded cannot be debarred from reviewing the past. If pain introduces itself into a moral sense, that sense, like a natural sense, tends to shut itself up. A distressed conscience may seek the darkness, like the victim of eye-disease, and then its work for the time being is at an end. Sin is of no great moment if it can pass into forgetfulness without an expiation; and if it is of no moment in relation to the past, it will be equally immaterial in relation to the future. To rectify the life is an aim of but third-rate importance when such thoughts rule men. The teacher who is to win and rule us in all that is right, and uplift the moral level of our nature, must reckon with sin, perhaps vicariously in his own person, or in some other way.

Some founders of religions have looked upon deliverance from sin as a goal to be reached after long courses of personal discipline, self-restraint, worship, and charity. If we ourselves at some future stage in our development shall have become competent to expiate sin, its significance is so far minimised that we shall not think it a serious problem. It will be in the same category as a vague terror before which childhood cringes, but at which the mature man laughs. To sin once more will be

like contracting a debt we shall be able to pay without feeling it, when we come into the possession of our own. Such notions lower man's sense of the nature and sanction of the law under which he is placed, and he cannot think himself in the pathway of salvation whilst this goes on. We can only hold a law that is higher than ourselves in connection with a doctrine of salvation by sacrifice. Unless sin is dealt with by the sovereign counsellor who solicits our faith, the more assiduously we cultivate character the bitterer will be the pain incurred, and at last in sheer self-defence we shall fall away from the high standards after which we aspire. Jesus Christ was sealed to His world-wide triumph by the Cross, which reckoned with human sin. The atonement He offered is the golden chain binding the myriads who bear His name to the imitation of His faultless pattern.

Our Lord proved His unworldliness by refusing to make numbers a test of success. He earnestly set Himself to sift out the superficial majority, and to keep Himself dissociated from those who would have acclaimed Him king. His crown must be otherwise won and His sceptre swayed over those who were permeated with the high experiences which were the staple of His own life. Any real participation in the secrets of His own inner consciousness could not be secured apart from an atonement. The great moral law which bears the name of Moses, and the ideals of worship he promulgated, could not have been maintained apart from a sacrificial system which solemnly

provided for the removal of sin. We sometimes speak of lofty moral systems and the ideas of expiation with which they were linked, as though the two things were separable, but it is impossible to have the one without the other. If the Jew had thought he could approach Jehovah without the reconciliation of sacrifice, his sense of the holiness of God would have been lowered and his sense of the obligation of righteousness weakened. If the law had been maintained only as a counsel of perfection, the Jew would have winked at his neighbour, as the sign they were both taking part in a common fraud. It was the assuagement of pain within the conscience found at the altar which enabled the Jew to be zealous for a law below which he often fell, and zealous without any strain of hypocrisy.

And this is still more true of the higher laws and more spiritual ideals of Jesus Christ. Jesus foresaw that erring and sin-stained disciples could never attain that mysterious communion of spirit with the Father, which was His own constant privilege, if the issue of redemption by a holy death was evaded. He could never hope to have in the holy place companions from the scenes of earth, apart from the blood of His own offered life with which He entered. He gave a freedom and a boldness to contrite transgressors in approaching a holy God, like that which was the right of His own faultless, filial spirit. Even though God could admit us into fellowship with Himself without the putting away of sin by sacrifice,

our moral standard, if low, would disqualify, and if high, would so terrorise that we could never struggle up to a common meeting-ground. The Atonement upholds those moral elements which are at the basis and beginning of all fellowship with God. Our Lord's mystic union of thought and life would have remained a secret whose seal no hand could break. This deepest quality of His experience could not be reproduced as the seed-corn reproduces itself in the ingathered harvest. The principle is also true of the Master's teaching. Men would not have dared to repeat His lessons, lest they should either convict themselves of hypocrisy in the presence of their fellows, or admit desert of punishment in the sight of God. The tendency would have been to soften down the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to the level of the world's daily habits and customs. For the disciple to have taught a doctrine of sin, honest and close to the facts, would have been to sound his own death-knell. The Cross braces men to look into sin and strip off its painted speciousness. Without the help of an atonement, the Lord's unflinching and heroic method of treating it, unswerving in severity and inimitable in tenderness, could not have survived. He would have been alone in His estimate of sin and the need He felt that it should be washed away. And the imitation of His activities would have been equally impossible. The disciples would have worshipped a less holy God than their Master, have had easier views of the obligations of righteousness,

and would have drifted into degenerate grooves of life and conduct. If a sacrificial death is to be omitted from the new religion, the disciples must forfeit the fellowship of His service and give up all hope of being conformed to His pattern. In His strange pureness, in the sweet benignities of His daily life, in His manifold ministries to a sinning and suffering world, Jesus must be alone. Without dying, He cannot reproduce Himself as the seed-corn reproduces itself in the ripened and ingathered harvest.

2. *The need that Jesus should die to vivify others with the principles of His own life, does not rest only upon the constitution of the human mind, but has its Divine side also.* God could not bless, accept, and sanctify a sinful world, bringing it into mystic union with Himself, apart from the processes of an atoning death. The free surrender of the one perfect life was the condition under which God was pleased to give light, quickening energy, and endless well-being to all believers. It was only thus that Jesus could be the first-born amongst many brethren. The necessity is just as urgent on the Divine as on the human side, although that perhaps was not the immediate thought in the mind of the great Teacher.

The present generation desires the wise and gracious Jesus of Nazareth, not only with His miraculous signs omitted from the life-story, but with His cross left forever in the mists of the past. It

assumes that His principles can be perpetuated throughout all ages and embodied in the order of our modern civilisations without a theology, and especially without a theology of atonement. It points to those who in some respects live Christ-like lives, but who turn in silent aversion from the death of Jesus and the doctrines it is supposed to connote. They tell us the reproduction of the great Teacher's principles is in no way connected with the pathos of His death-story, or the dogmatic colouring given to it. And of course it is impossible to deny some of the assumptions which enter into the argument. The Spirit of Jesus often works in those who lack a creed, and we have no right to account this unhappy lack as a sign of final reprobation. The life, Christ-like in some of its aspects, may have been produced by a creed that has slowly lost its vitality and is at last abjured. These estimable, upright, and unselfish men are members of Christian communities, and although they no longer share the old faiths, they reflect and respond to the sentiments the old faiths are still producing in the mind of the multitude. Men rarely reach the same high levels, although they possess much inward light, in communities where Jesus Christ is unknown, or honoured only as one of many teachers who have providentially appeared in the world. Apart from the tradition of what Christ has done for men, it is questionable whether His pattern will bind and His teaching inspire through

the unknown centuries of the after-times. For the past eighteen centuries, in no part of the world has His name continued to live in honour and praise, apart from the Cross by which He redeemed men. It is the fact that He has done something for us, and not merely spoken a message, that gives Him His earthly immortality and makes His life a seed-corn which is always being sown afresh through the long generations.

We admire the robust honesty of Socrates, and copy his shrewd methods in our literature; but he has done no specific work for us which has created a personal tie, and no one preaches him as a world-wide pattern in all things. We follow the teaching of Plato with delight, and recognise how noble were many of his speculations; but we have no desire for sacramental incorporation into his life. Confucius taught filial piety, and showed how it was the root of every family and civic virtue; but we hold the same essentials of secular morality apart from his sanction, and are under no obligation to the teacher of the Far East. Indeed, we are half inclined to look upon him as the partisan of a race. His influence has always made for virtue, but he did nothing beyond the common, although it is his good fortune to have attained unequalled fame. Buddha attempted no vicarious service for even the priests and nuns who follow his cult, and according to his theory of unalterable moral sequence, could do nothing beyond announce his philosophy, and

he has left the life of the East on no higher plane than it had reached before he came. No Buddhist professes personal love to the unselfish dreamer who thought out a passionless, religious philosophy. Not one in a hundred million hopes to reach his level. And it is thus also with the teachers of recent centuries. They have told us what we might perhaps have found out for ourselves. There is no personal tie. Who desires a memorial rite expressing incorporation into a common life with the writer who has influenced us most, be his name Carlyle, Ruskin, Darwin, or Browning? It is Christ's death and the peculiar doctrine centring in it which is the conserving salt of His teaching, fellowship, and practical life. It is by His cross He binds to Himself the hearts of the unending generations. Whatever the precise shade of our redemptive theology, we all realise that He has dealt with the question of sin for us, dealt with it as no other being could. The life and the truth He set forth are but unplanted seed-corn. The seed must drop into the darkness and die, if spiritual harvests are to lift themselves year by year from these earthly fields and ripen in the summer sunshine of God's smile. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone."

II.

Jesus lays aside the symbolism of the seed-corn, and states a plain principle of sacrifice through which the lives of the disciples must be conformed to His own.

"He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." Our Lord's allusions to His own death were brief. Perhaps the overpowering emotion excited by the subject compelled Him to pass over it quickly. Vicarious love must produce a kindred quality in His followers. He takes the disciples back to the motive which was uppermost when they told Him of the desire of the Greeks to see Him. The leaven of their old ambition was still at work, and they had not been weaned from the notion of a political Messiahship, which was to bring them in due time to honour and delight, as friends and companions of the theocratic King. A cross is before the King, and His subjects also must be mortified after the law it sets up. In words which suggest a new sanction for self-surrender, and are perhaps also a prophetic hint of the martyr-destinies of the first disciples, Jesus exclaims, "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

Whilst affirming a common law of surrender for Himself and His disciples, Jesus in no sense obliter-

ates the stupendous dividing line between His sacrifice and the self-abnegation of those whom He fills with His spirit. If there were no distinction of original nature between Jesus and His disciples, the fact that He was the forerunner in this pathway of sacrifice, and they but humble imitators, would put His work into a category entirely separate from that of the disciples. The glory belongs to Him who first reveals and exemplifies this ineffable law, not to speak of the fact that the highest and most unselfish heroism of the disciple is a pulsation which starts from the great heart of the Crucified. It is His self-surrender which is continued in that of the disciple. "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, or be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am baptised?" In some degree it may be, but the difference is still immeasurable. James and John in their unillumined days at least recognised that the throne of Jesus was a central throne, and not a throne in a circle of thrones, the one like the other. Redemption was a solitary act to which one holy and unspotted Being alone was equal, and we are neither called upon nor competent to lay down our lives to redeem men.

Vivified by Christ's death and made to share His spirit, we ourselves must become a seed-corn, and go into the darkness and humiliation of the earth, to continue for others the life we ourselves have received. It is pleasant to tarry in the sunshine, but we must be content to forgo the conditions

for which the flesh so often cries. If we allow the glamour of the world to captivate us, we shall miss the deepest meaning and be disappointed of the richest promise of life, and be "alone," with none to thank God for our work and enshrine us in their grateful love. We must sacrifice the lower allurements to taste the higher joy and blessedness of our Lord. This law will determine the progress of religion amongst men. The life trampled underfoot, cast away, despised as though it were of little account, for the sake of others, we shall find again unto life eternal. In the order of natural growth there is an unconscious, vicarious law. Let the seed-corn remind us of the Master's meek, unresisting surrender to death for the redemption of the race, and of the obligation His cross places upon disciples. Let the ingathered sheaves remind us that His sacrifice is always fruitful, that the golden grain is ever passing into eternal garners, and that the labours in which we emulate His Spirit are not in vain in the Lord.

THE GARDEN OF THE LORD

By W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

THE GARDEN OF THE LORD

"The Lord God planted a garden in Eden."—GENESIS xi. 8.

WHERE the garden was planted is a matter of no concern at present. The text is full of beautiful words and ideas. The name of a garden is redolent with sweetness, and gives rise to delightful visions. The Divine Planter is the eternal Beauty; and when He plants, all He does means perfection. The name of the garden is Eden, which signifies delight. Every word, therefore, in the text is suggestive in the highest degree, and combines every element of brightness. The famous gardens of antiquity, such as the hanging gardens of Babylon, constructed by Nebuchadnezzar for the delectation of his wife Amuhia; or those of Nineveh, in which the luxurious and effeminate Sardanapalus spent his leisure; or the more wonderful garden of Cyrus, if indeed it is not purely legendary, of which the great king said he planted every tree, shrub, and flower with his own hand, and all such as these, however extensive and beautiful, pale into entire insignificance as compared with the glories of the two gardens recorded in the Bible, as being the

handiwork of the Lord God, one described in the book of Genesis ("the Beginning") as being planted in Eden, and one in the Apocalypse ("the Unveiling") as being planted in Paradise, the city of the Eternal King. Both of these gardens seem to concentrate in themselves every feature of material blessedness, but they also represent beauty more spiritual and magnificence more complete than earth can show. The picture given of each is heightened to our imagination by the presence in them of special manifestations of the Divine presence. The Voice of God was heard walking in Eden, the Lord God and the Lamb are the light and glory of Paradise. In a peculiar sense God may be said to be in every garden. In no places on earth do we find so much of what is sweet, beautiful, and attractive to the smell, the taste, or the sight, as in a garden. In no spot is there so much to gratify man's high and refined tastes. To nowhere else is he so much given to retire for true and happy relaxation. The love of flowers and plants is the most innocent and hopeful recreation of modern civilisation. The opening of parks and gardens for the people has given new zest to the lives of millions in our crowded towns and cities in the last generation, and the establishment of garden cities by philanthropic men and companies of men is likely to promote, more than can now be realised, the great elevating purposes which are essentially embodied in Christianity.

There are several ideas involved in the name of a

garden, which readily occur to us. To consider these will give us some understanding of the mind and purposes of the Lord God in the representations of His gardens in the books of Genesis and the Apocalypse. In several portions of Scripture they are made use of to illustrate the Living Church of Christ, and great fundamental truths as to man's nature and destiny.

I.

A garden must be enclosed.

It is taken in from the waste or wilderness, and a hedge or a wall put around it. The bridegroom in the Canticles, where the garden is so often made a figure of speech, says, "A garden barred is my sister, my spouse." The enclosure is necessary for the sake of separation, of ownership, of retirement, and of enjoyment. The garden is not a common, an unowned, or uncultivated space. It is a piece of ground carefully selected, marked out, then fenced off so as to be separated from the wilderness, and surrounded with a sufficient protection. It is thus that the Church of God, so often presented under the figure of a garden, is described. It is called and chosen out of the mass of mankind because of the fitness of the members. By faith they become trees of the Lord's right-hand planting; they become "rooted and grounded" in Christ. They are transplanted from the waste into the garden, and growing in grace

they bloom in fullness of life, adorning by their beauty the doctrine of the Master in all things. "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks"; "I will be a wall of fire round about thee." So the garden is fenced off and secured by the watchful provision of the Owner and Lord.

II.

A garden necessarily conveys the idea of cultivation.

The soil must be prepared, the plan carefully drawn, the plants systematically collected and arranged, provision made for the shelter of delicate plants, means of refreshment supplied by irrigation and fertilising agents, pruning and training carried out, with every wise expedient for promoting the great end of the owner in preparing and planting the ground. Weeds and noxious elements must be eradicated, and continual vigilance exercised to prevent the entrance of injurious influences. Thus only a garden can be kept in order and brought to perfection. Order is an essential element in true garden cultivation. Not the order of geometry or mathematics, of straight lines and proportions, but the order of natural beauty, where nothing jars on the taste or offends propriety, where there is freedom and variety without excess or exuberance, where all colours and scents and forms are found, but so arranged and blended as to heighten the

effect and increase the enjoyment. When the Lord God plants a garden, this is always the result. Men mingle colours and often produce a shock; but where God plants a group of various coloured flowers they always blend perfectly and produce delightful sensations. God's garden, as we shall see, is always arranged to gratify every sense and appeal to every pure emotion and refined fancy.

The description of a garden given by a king to his bride is found in the Canticles (iv. 15), and describes in picturesque manner the charms of a thoroughly arranged and cultivated pleasure ground: "Thy shoots are a paradise of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, henna with spikenard plants, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices . . . a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon." The elements of a true garden are here described, but the chapter from which the text is taken describes one immeasurably grander than even an Eastern potentate ever imagined. The Garden of Eden, as its picture is drawn in Genesis, combined all attractions possible, on an immense scale, and in completeness of beauty only equalled by that garden which is presented as the symbol of the perfect glory and happiness of heaven to the gaze of the rapt exile of Patmos.

III.

The Divine garden is described as being perfect in the abundance of its trees, its flowers, and its glistening waters.

1. "*Every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.*" The country of Assyria, where the Garden of Eden was supposed to be placed, was unsurpassed by any country for its magnificent foliage. There the cedar-tree flourished abundantly. It was called "the tree of the Lord," and in the Bible is exalted above all other trees. Celebrated as the glory of Lebanon, the writers of the Bible dwelt on its spreading magnificence with untiring enthusiasm. To this day there is one grove of cedars remaining on the mountain, called "the Grove of Kedisha," and each tree stands in majesty, covered with dark green foliage, and rich with the holy associations of thousands of years. Of these the words of the Psalmist are still true, "The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted." Other trees which are named in Scripture are the oak, of which a fine specimen remains standing near Hebron, and called "Abraham's Oak." It is of great antiquity and spreading beauty, measuring twenty-three feet in girth, and extending over a diameter of ninety feet. The palm-tree also is a prince in the vegetable kingdom of the East, with its cylindrical stem towering high into the air, and unfurling a canopy of enormous leaves, in whose

shadow are suspended great clusters of fruit. A lordly and generous tree it is, to which the righteous are fitly compared by the Psalmist. The terebinth tree is an Eastern growth of great beauty, bearing clusters of fruit, and exuding turpentine of purest quality in large quantities. These trees, with many others, especially the vine-tree with its refreshing fruit, which was both meat and drink to the populations of Canaan and other Oriental lands, made the Garden of Eden a scene of majestic and lordly splendour. Lesser in size and grandeur were many fruit-bearing trees, as the orange, the fig, the olive, and the date, all of unspeakable value to man for food and pleasing to the eye for grace, making true the words of the old English poet:

"Than a tree, a grander child earth bears not."

2. The garden of the Lord God is also *brilliant and fragrant with innumerable flowers.* God seems to lavish all His art on flowers, both as to form and colour and smell. Every single flower is an object worthy of much examination. Luther said: "If a man could make a rose, he would deserve to receive the kingdom of heaven as his reward." God scatters flowers everywhere. They grow close to the mouth of a volcano and amidst the snows of the Arctic regions. They are found in the sandy steppes of the desert and in the swamps of marshy lands. God has left no man destitute of these messengers and preachers of His love. How much of the Divine appeal is in

them, may be estimated by the consideration which all true poets have given them. Shakespeare scatters references to them throughout his writings with a prodigal hand, and Milton is even more free in his use of them. Thomson and Cowper, Burns and Scott, Wordsworth and Southey, Rogers and Keats, Shelley and Keble, abound in references to them, with many others, as though every look at the lovely creations aroused in them "thoughts that did lie too deep for tears." None of these were more inspired by flowers than Dante, who has drawn the plan of heaven itself as a vast and full-blown rose, with its thousands of millions of blessed spirits circling in order round the central throne. In the Divine garden the rose holds the central place as it does in ours. "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," says the great poet-prophet of Scripture. Some such picture must have been before his mind when he wrote thus, as could have been seen in that day, for the rose-gardens of Jericho were famous in old times, and so also were those at Damascus. Perhaps the most wonderful sight of rose-gardens to-day is to be found in Bulgaria, where days may be spent in travelling through the rose plantations, and where the air is freighted with the fragrance. But the rose is only one of the many myriads of beautiful flowers scattered in the Divine garden. The lily has special mention, and was supremely honoured by Christ in being made the symbol of a glory more perfect than that of Solomon in his ostentatious splendour. Whether it

was the fine crimson martagon lily or the modest lily of the valley, we know not; but all lilies have their charm, and none more than the exquisite creamy flower that unfolds its sweetness on the surface of the lake. Flowers are practically infinite in their variety. There is no hue or colour, no grace of form, no sweetness of aroma but flowers gather into themselves. They even are made a figure of Jesus Himself. "He shall grow up like a tender plant," "all His garments shall smell of myrrh, and aloes and cassia"; and, until the so-called higher criticism disturbed our good old-fashioned methods of interpretation, our divines spoke of Him as "the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley." Whilst we think of the forms and colours of the flowers as illustrating God's love of beauty, He has been as profuse in filling the garden with lovely odours. We are told by the prophet of "the smell of Lebanon." He referred to the scent of the cedar-trees, which perfumed the region round about, and when the north wind blew, the sweetness was carried far away, even to the plains of Esdraelon. Then down to the scent of the saffron, the cinnamon, and calamus, the garden was filled with rich perfumes. A few years ago there was a garden in one of our midland counties called "The sweet garden," owned by a blind man. Every plant in it was sweet-smelling, and the variety was marvellous. Gilliflowers, honeysuckle, sweet brier, jessamine, sweet peas, mignonette, wallflowers, all the flowers and herbs of sweet odours were there; not forgetting lavender,

which Hugh Macmillan avers was the spikenard of Scripture. The shapes and colours of flowers were lost on the blind man, but he found constant delight in their various odours, and quickly recognised every one. Flowers are not only for pleasure, but for use. Many are used for food, more still as medicines and specifics in disease. But all speak eloquently of the beauty, forethought, wisdom, tenderness, and love of the Great Creator who has made the earth a garden filled with beauty and sweetness, both for His own sake and ours.

3. The richness, brightness, and fertility of the garden which the Lord God planted were due to the *boundless and never-failing water supply with which it was provided.* "A river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from thence it was parted and became four heads." Each of the heads became an overflowing river, and the garden must be conceived of as covering a large portion of a continent. It became the richest garden in the world. Its fruits and crops were almost fabulous in abundance, and the nations who came to dwell in it became enormously wealthy. The four rivers, as the cause of the richness and beauty of the garden, were not only infinitely beneficent, but were themselves unspeakably beautiful. They sparkled with brightness; their waters were so pure, plenteous, and vivifying as to be themselves the most glorious features of the landscape. All gardens depend on the water supply for their chief attraction and charm. When the summer tourists

go to Chatsworth, the most cultivated of our baronial estates, and, standing on the terrace, look around, they are thrilled with admiration at the far-stretching prospect. But their pleasure is not full till the gardener turns on the water supply, and the pure glancing streams begin to flow down the hill-side, and the fountains begin to play. Then the scene is perfect in its charm and glory. This is even more remarkably realised when the grandest palace in Europe, Versailles, is visited. It must be on a day when the water flows, if the enjoyment is to be full. When the great Neptune fountain in the front of the palace sends its laughing stream far up towards the sky, and it comes down with merry plash, to flow in rippling floods in every direction. When fountains of all shapes and sizes, also, "shake their loosening silver in the sun," and even every garden walk has its line of shining bead-drops running in gladness at your feet. A wondrous sight it is; but what about the first garden of earth, with rivers like the Euphrates and the Tigris as its irrigants and beautifiers! This was surely God's ideal of an earthly paradise. But His inventiveness as a Gardener was not exhausted by the planting of Eden. The picture of the garden of heaven reaches a higher level of perfect beauty and brightness than that of Eden. If the description is poetical and symbolical, let it not be forgotten that all symbols fall far short of the realities and substances they stand for; and therefore, inspiring as is the prospect opened out before John the Apostle, heaven

itself as far exceeds it as the sunshine surpasses the light of the moon. That picture is an unveiling of the joy and blessedness prepared by God for every believer in Christ, and with it this setting forth of God's gardens may fitly close:—"And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruits, yielding its fruits every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and His servants shall do Him service; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign unto the ages of ages."

The Garden of Eden is no longer on earth as planted by God, but the ineffable splendours of the heavenly paradise are open to all believers. May every reader of this volume enter into their fullest glory.

THE GOSPEL OF LAUGHTER

By G. CURRIE MARTIN, M.A., B.D.

THE GOSPEL OF LAUGHTER

"Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing."—PSALM cxxvi. 2.

I HAD probably not dared to suppose that laughter was a part of worship unless I had read it here. We are so unaccustomed to connect the two ideas. It may seem to some little short of blasphemy to suggest that they can be thus closely connected. Yet it is no proof that laughter is not one of God's best and greatest gifts, that we often use it in unworthy ways. As the old Latin poet said, it is only the best things that can produce the most terrible corruption, and it is God's highest gifts that man can most fearfully abuse. When, then, laughter has become synonymous with frivolity, folly, and sometimes even open sin, that may only be because one of the noblest powers of our life has been degraded. Yet laughter is, perhaps, one of the clearest proofs that we are one with God, in the essential nature of our life. At anyrate, we only read of two orders of beings in the universe that laugh, men and God. It may be a strange place to look for proofs of our Divine origin, and yet it may be no

less true. Laughter is a many-sided thing. It is the expression of emotion, but not of one emotion alone. There seem to be three chief feelings which laughter can express. There may be modifications of these, the one may run into the other, and elements of one may be present in another, but in the main they are to be distinguished as Joy, Surprise, Scorn. The first is the most common and natural, and consists of all kinds of joy, from the overflowing gladness of the child to the strong, exultant laughter of the most richly endowed human being. The second is like the laughter of Sarah, the utterance of amazement that, for the moment at least, has not reached the level of faith. And, last of all, there is the bitter, cruel, merciless laughter of scorn. But now, we have only to deal with the first of these—*the laughter of joy.* But so rich is joy, especially the joy of religion, that it takes many forms and has many sources.

I.

The special character of it that is here presented to us, is the joy of deliverance.

Those who sang this song were the men and women who had known the bitterness of exile. For years they had tried to sing in an alien land, but could not. Their captors had demanded songs, and their hearts had been breaking as they endeavoured

to respond. But now everything is changed. They are returning to their fatherland. The new walls of the Holy City gleam on the top of the hill. The rebuilding of the Temple is already a realised possibility. Worship and home, the renewal of their national life, and of their national religion, is no longer a dream, but within the realm of actuality. What wonder, then, that they burst forth into a shout of laughter and a song of praise. We are told that when Fowell Buxton, the man who gave his life to accomplish the freedom of the slave, lay dying, with apparently his life-work unaccomplished, and the gloom of his unfulfilled task darkening his soul, and one came to him and said, "Buxton, the Act is passed, the emancipation is accomplished, the slaves are free," the dying man roused himself, and with an access of fresh strength, cried aloud, "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." That is the peculiar quality of the laughter we have here to consider. It is praise born of deliverance, joy that is the fruit of freedom. That, surely, is the dominant note of the Christian religion. Its sweetness comes from its memories of deliverance, its gladness from the recollection of the past slavery from which we have been redeemed. To-day we rejoice in the gladness of harvest, and with poetic fancy sing of the very valleys laughing in the rich abundance of their golden grain. But this is only the imagination of the poet attributing to them the feelings of the human heart, as if they

knew that the dark days of winter, the uncertainties of spring, the fear of floods, the drought of scorching summer, had all been safely passed, and now we had entered into the land of perfect deliverance. A religious faith might almost be tested by its power to praise. Not prayer itself is so fine a test as is praise. Prayer is easy. Life's experiences force us to pray. Even the most irreligious man is sooner or later driven to his knees by sorrow, by suffering, or by fear; but the secret of praise is only with those who have tasted the Divine mercy and the Divine goodness. We have gone a far way in the religious life before we realise the truth of the old mystic's words, "A line of praise is worth a leaf of prayer." We are all too ready to accept the spirit of resignation, or of trust, as the highest proof of a religious soul. But Robert Louis Stevenson saw deeper into the meaning of religion in the parable he gives us somewhere of his soul's garden. He presents the picture of his going out and conversing with his gardener, and finding one plant everywhere throughout the garden. It flourished there with the greatest profusion, and he said to the man, "What is this herb?" "The herb of resignation," was the response. "Out with it, man: out with it!" was the reply of that courageous soul. "I will have none of it any longer. Replace it with the herb of joy, but see it is the flowering sort." The flowering sort, that is the secret. Not only a joy that is real and inward, but

a joy that so scatters its fragrance and its beauty that all men may catch the sweetness; and that to wander in the soul's garden is a joy and delight, not only to the Master, but to all his guests. May we not use an occasion like this to revise our conceptions of religion? We say, "Oh, it is a matter of temperament; it is easy for some men to be glad. They are born so. Their natures are radiant, and like Ulysses, they ever 'with a frolic welcome take the thunder and the sunshine.'" But I am not arguing for the spirit of an easy optimism. That is far enough away from the faith, the triumphant faith of Jesus Christ. But I plead none the less for the necessity of the joyful temper. The text comes not from the New Testament, but from the Old, and a great expert on the religion of the Old Testament has told us that "There is an endless variety of phrase for the thought that the pious exult in God—delight in Him as at a gladsome thanksgiving festival." And yet Israel had not, as a nation, a heritage of untroubled peace, but passed through many varying vicissitudes. The secret, then, for her must have lain deeper than that of outward circumstance or good fortune. Nor will anyone argue that Luther was a man the current of whose life flowed ever smoothly. Yet when he sums up the content of the Gospel, he says, "Do you ask me what is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? I will tell you. It is nothing other than laughter and mirth." To me that seems always

not only a brave, but a deeply spiritual utterance, penetrating into the very purpose and heart of God. It is, of course, when we turn to the most evangelical of the Evangelists, to the Gospel of Luke, that we find this glad music of joy everywhere prevalent. He revels in words that are expressive of the exuberance of gladness. He is the great poet of the gospel. Not only angels in heaven, but aged saints and youthful maidens on earth herald the gospel in song. Those who experience its gifts shout, exult, and even leap for joy. Life is in sympathy with the inward experience of the soul, and to him, as to us, the world reflects the inward loveliness of the cleansed and re-created person.

"For when heaven's bluest,
And earth feels newest,
And love longs truest,
And takes no rest;
When winds blow cleanest,
And seas roll sheenest,
And lawns lie greenest,
Then, night and day,
Dear life counts dearest,
And God walks nearest,
To them that praise Him!"

There is the secret of the truest laughter—that a man walk close with God.

Let us remember that *not only the idea but the word has been consecrated by the lips of the Master Himself.* I can well believe that the Evangelist has recorded the true form of his Lord's utterance

when he tells us that He said, "Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall laugh." A later day may have been afraid to attribute the word to these sacred lips, and have changed it to the more ordinary expression, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." But, surely, He who was so intimately acquainted with the Old Testament, and who was in Himself its most perfect fulfilment, must have remembered the words of the text, when He named among the certainties of the future this one, that whatever voices of earth would find no echo in heaven, the voice of laughter would not be silenced. There is the note of prophetic certainty in the word, and nothing could bring home to us with greater clearness the oneness of the joy that unites our present life with that which lies before us, than this unity in the holiness of the expression of gladness. Mirth is not born of the earth to pass away with the earth, but is, as another singer of our own day has reminded us,

> "A God-like function,
> Mirth comes to thee unsought;
> Mirth sweeps before it like a flood the mill
> Of languaged logic; thought
> Hath not its source so high."

Heaven-born, the true and holy laughter also points to heaven as its fitting place of consummation.

II.

This brings us to the next thought — that laughter suggests the social aspect of joy.

When we speak of reverting to Puritan ideals, men often consider that we are reverting to a gloomy conception of life and of society; but was the Puritan ideal a gloomy one? Mistaken notions of Puritanism so paint it, but, in truth, the highest Puritanism was anything but gloomy. What was the most perfect presentation of Puritan religion? Was it not Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress?* Let me remind you of what he has to say of the function of laughter. In the wonderful scene in the hostelry of Gaius, he gathers together the company of pilgrims round the supper-table. There old Honest sets the society in merry mood with his quips and riddles and joyful sayings. But there is one little group of people who sit far off in a dark corner, amazed and ashamed. They cannot understand such a novel conception of religion, these men of faint heart and little faith. But as the humour passes from lip to lip, the laughter becomes infectious, until even these gloomy ones are found smiling; and at last, as Bunyan phrases it, "One laughed, and another laughed, and they all laughed together." And then the most marvellous thing of all happened. These men and women were not

only baptised into the spirit of laughter, but also into the spirit of courage, for on the morrow, when they set forth upon their journey, they were almost immediately summoned to a difficult and dangerous adventure, and for the first time these feeble ones, who had always before required the help of their brother pilgrims when in difficulty, became themselves fighters, and were enabled to take part in vanquishing their foes. Thus the old truth was once again manifested, "the joy of the Lord" become their "strength." Laughter, then, is really a help to faith, and joy is something not to be kept to ourselves, but to be scattered with a free and willing heart till all men learn to rejoice with us. We must be ready not only to realise God's goodness for ourselves, but to disseminate it until the hearts of others, learning our secret, are enabled to rejoice with our joy. I like the form in which the old Scottish version renders the Psalm,

"Serve Him with mirth, His praise forthtell."

If we had more mirth in our religion, it would be not only stronger, but more gracious and effective. One of the most remarkable features about the recent revival of religion in Wales was this quality of gladness; and we are told that the leader of it was in the habit of saying, "Don't be afraid to laugh, even at the throne of God." It is a pilgrim's virtue, and the more our life has within it the quality of the true pilgrimage, the more necessary

is joy for its perfection. I remember reading some time ago about one who had been a constant companion to a friend in expeditions on the continent of Europe, and the witness was borne to him that he was the most perfect of comrades, for this reason, that in him was an unfailing spring of gladness. "So long as the journey lasted," said his friend, "the joy lasted also. There was never a moment but was blissful, and never a *contretemps* such as is unavoidable on the road, but he, in his beautiful contentment, laughed it away." I do not know if any finer thing could be said of any of us than that. When our journey is over and friends recollect our influence upon them, I think we had rather have that testimony truthfully borne to us than any other.

But I wish us to understand that this task of bearing ever the glad heart is by no means so easy as men often think it. As I have already said, the truest laughter does not spring from the heart that always takes life easily and knows no burden; but the souls in which laughter triumphs are those which have the heaviest burdens to bear, and are well acquainted with sorrow. In the wonderful prayers which Robert Louis Stevenson wrote for his household at Samoa, there is one petition which must always touch the hearts of those who know his life: "Give us courage, and gaiety, and the quiet mind." How few of us venture in our prayers to ask for gaiety as one of the divinest gifts! And

yet why should we not, if we will only realise that to pray such a prayer does not mean that we are thereby seeking to shirk our cross?

III.

And that brings me to the last point, namely, the source and secret of this spirit.

It is a remarkable, but often forgotten fact, that our Lord Himself designated the final purpose of His sacrifice as the awarding of the gift of joy. He told His disciples that the end of His life was to be, not their redemption or deliverance, but this, that their "joy might be made full"; and if that is our Lord's purpose for us, then we must realise that in discovering the secret of joy and showing forth its power, we are best fulfilling His intention. But the joy that has any shallower spring than union with His spirit must necessarily fail in that higher purpose, and must be chastened by His fellowship, while those lives which are being lived in gloom and shadow have to be lifted out of it into the pure light of His love. I can perhaps best illustrate my meaning by a concrete illustration. In the days of the German Pietists there was a young pastor, who had finished a brilliant career at the university, and become established in the little parish, where he was looking forward to a life of active and useful service. Suddenly he was told that his health was

in such a precarious condition that he must immediately lay aside his work and banish all hope of the career upon which he had set his heart. He himself tells how he saw his little room stripped of all its belongings, and at last left bare, save for two objects. On one wall hung the calendar on which he had planned out the first year of his work, every hour crowded with prospective engagements. Opposite it hung a crucifix, and it seemed to him as if the one mocked the other. With bitterness of soul he looked at that calendar, that spoke of purposes unfulfilled and plans of service unaccomplished, and words of rebellion sprang to his lips. Then he tells us how, in softer mood, he knelt before the cross, and at length the spirit of the Crucified subdued him, and he was enabled from his heart to repeat the prayer of Gethsemane, "Thy will be done." When he rose from his knees, not only was the bitterness passed and the rebellion over, but, he says, an even stranger thing happened, for the only words he could utter were those of the Psalmist, "Then was my mouth filled with laughter, and my tongue with singing."

We, too, can be taught this lesson, and a joy, that the world neither gives nor removes, can become ours if we learn it, under the shadow of the Cross.

THE SPRING-TIME AND GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

By J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE SPRING-TIME AND GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

"Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."—PSALM cvii. 43.

WHAT are these things from which we are to learn one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, of religious truths? Where are we to find proofs that "the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind"? Are we directed to the mighty deliverances granted to His ancient people, advised to ransack our memories for records of signal mercies shown to us? or are we to tread those gospel fields where infinite pity assumed a human form, and Divine love enshrined itself in a cross? No! the Psalmist tells us here that the secret is revealed in the common walks of life. Our text is just the concluding sentence of a psalm which deals mainly with what we call the ordinary operations of Nature. It speaks of storms and calms, and clouds and vapours, and rains, and of sowing and planting, and of the gracious power which clothes the barren land with fruitfulness, and changes the dead, cheerless winter into the living verdure and

beauty of the summer season; and then it winds up with these beautiful words: "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." To this writer, evidently, as in a higher sense to the Lord Jesus, Nature was a storehouse of Divine parables. The seen things suggested the unseen, and the earthly was a type of the heavenly. We are here on the same ground which the Master trod, when He saw touches of the Father's hand in the lilies, and heard in the chirpings of the sparrows sermons about providential care, and found in the sower and the seed-time symbols of everlasting truth, and spoke as if the whole earth were the place of God's feet with His footprints everywhere. And, truly, there is a book of God, written for plain people, in revolving seasons, seed-time and harvest, bloom and fruit. It needs no learned mind to understand it, but only the honest, open eye, and the simple wisdom of the child. What man with a healthy nature can fail to be instructed, and almost inspired by the poetry, and the joy, and the fresh, sweet life of the vernal season? I wish I could preach you such a sermon this morning as the beautiful verdure and the delicate spring flowers are reading to you outside; but no human lips are eloquent enough to compete with these voices, for they are the speech of God Himself.

At these times when we have just left the winter behind, and "He that sitteth on the throne is making all things new"; when God is painting

pictures everywhere, such as shame the works of the most cunning artists, we cannot help feeling gladness and giving thanks—we inbreathe the loving-kindness of the Lord. The air is quivering with it, and our pulses throb faster with the joy of it. I would not wish to live in lands where perpetual summer reigns, and the trees never cast their verdure, and there is no relief from the monotony of luscious warmth and splendour. We need winter's dark background to set off the flowers of spring-time, and the remembrance of dreary scenes to give rapture to our enjoyment of landscape, painted anew with meadow-grass and flowers. These changes and contrasts help to make life full, just as sorrow gives a keener edge to joy, and labour sweetens rest, and the darkness of the night prepares for the breezy freshness and splendour of the morning, and the toils and struggles of the earthly life make the weary spirit ready for its great and eternal reward. The very changes of life which we dread, the mingling of shadows and sunlight, the season of decay and death, and the season of resurrection and life, are a proof of the loving-kindness of the Lord.

And to me the goodness of the Lord is shown by the fact that *spring-time seems to make our hearts young again.* In renewing the face of the earth, He renews our sense of beauty and the keenness of our appreciation. There is never anything stale in this new creation. Though we have seen it fifty, sixty, or more years, it is as lovely and wonderful as when our

eyes first took it in. Nay, I sometimes think that the spring-time is more gladdening and inspiring to us now than it was in childhood. Poets have called it the season of youth; the season in which young fancy revels and young love sports; the season in which childhood finds its heaven, and maidenhood dreams its happiest dreams. Wordsworth, among others, sighs for the days when he gathered buttercups as if they were gold, and chased butterflies as if to catch them was a fortune; and he speaks of that charm and glory of Nature, so dear to young life, which have vanished for the older people—vanished in the mist and doubt and weariness of years.

"There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more."

It may seem a bold thing to call this in question—yet I am equal to that audacity. I know not how it may be with irreligious, diseased, or cynical minds, but I know how it is with myself, and I think I can guess how it is with you. Never do we see the violets and primroses come again, and watch the budding and blooming of the trees; never do we witness the annual resurrection, without stirrings of delight and sentiments of pure worship and thanksgiving as

deep, if not deeper, as those of old. God's works do not grow less lovely and inviting to the morally healthy soul; but more suggestive, more prophetic, more eloquent. The glory grows, the splendours have more meaning, there is, perhaps, less of the pagan delight of childhood, but there is more of the satisfying joy of reverent gratitude. We find ourselves almost unconsciously saying with the Psalmist: "Thou, Lord, hast made me glad with the works of Thy hands." I like better what the old man, John Ruskin, wrote, than those somewhat melancholy words which I have quoted from Wordsworth—"To watch the corn grow and the blossoms set, to walk amid the flowers and hear the song of birds, to read, to love, and to pray: these are the things that make men happy." And if the heart be true, flowers never grow old, verdure is never stale, and the ecstasies of the opening spring-time and the summer's grandeur never appeal in vain. Every year the world becomes bonnier, every year the sweet, tender foliage awakens new joy, and the earth is always young to those natures which God has purified by faith, and who walk in it as His dear children.

How can you observe these things without believing in the loving-kindness of the Lord? *Spring-time tells you of a bounty which is infinitely large and free.* "He satisfieth the desire of every living thing." There is a magnificent generosity in His giving altogether unlike man's. He does not keep His treasures and gifts for those who love Him

only, He bestows them on the just and the unjust, on the thankful and the thankless; on those who bless Him every day, and those who are always cursing Him in their hearts; on all ages and conditions of men. There is no doctrine of election here, no favouritism. It is a love which cannot help loving and doing good to all. No one can monopolise these dear gifts of God. The best of them are common property. Every one gets his share. The tired factory operative can have them for the trouble of half an hour's walk. The squalid child of the gutter, if he can only steal away a few stone's-throws from his alley and get where the grass and daisies grow, is as much a lord of that domain as he who owns the amplest acres. You talk about Socialism and community of goods! well, there is a piece of God's own socialism there. The world of beauty is too large to be walled in; no private key can lock up Nature's ample chambers. You may fence off parks and gardens, but I do not care, so long as you leave me the hedgerows full of blossom, so long as there are soft, green meadows to walk through, and the scent of flowers floating in benedictions through the balmy air. Your title-deeds may reserve and keep strictly private a small part of God's estate, a mere infinitesimal portion of it; but the whole sweet world is mine. The very lavishness of Nature proves that God wishes all His children to have part in the boon. He flings out His treasures with almost wasteful hand; covering all sorts of obscure and hidden places with

them, making grass and flowers to spring up under window-sills, on heaps of refuse, on untrodden streets, in the niches of the hard rock, and in the flower-pots of sick chambers, that everyone may have a chance of seeing and enjoying some of the good. "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." You can never doubt the loving-kindness of the Lord when your eyes are on all the wealth of spring-time. You may have doubts of it when you pass in review the sorrows and the guilts and the awful agonies of city life, when you think of all the miseries half-hidden in the crowded slums, and of the bruised and broken hearts which are often found in the suburban houses, and of all the lives that seem born for suffering and despair. When you think of these things there arises many a question, hard to answer, concerning the pity and the goodness of the great Father. But turn from these depressing things to the world of beauty that lies around you in the spring-time, and the joy which seems to kiss the face of everyone; then you cannot help feeling that a kindly Father's heart is behind all this. Nothing but pure goodness would have made all this free wealth of life and gladness. "Whoso will observe these things shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

Further, do not these things suggest to us thoughts of *the moral and spiritual forces in God, of which they are but material emblems.* How wonderful is that hidden source of life which year by year clothes the

earth with unspeakable grace! It is not in the soil, sunlight, and rain. No one ever thinks of attributing life-giving power to them. Chemistry cannot account for it; no analysis can detect it. There is a great fountain of life, invisible, inexhaustible, of which we see but the outflowing, and we know that it is in the heart and mind of the eternal God. It lays hold of dead things, corrupt things, heaps of refuse, and converts them all into things of perfect beauty. They are all transfigured, they are clothed as a bride; and who can think of this and not think also of that spiritual power of God which is ever at work, changing the old, weary, corrupt, sinning heart of man into the gladness of a new nature, and the purity of sweet, young love? Can you think of spring-time without a prayer that the same power which produces so wonderful a transformation in the world of matter may change your lives, and spread over them a deeper and more abiding spiritual beauty? When you look upon your gardens and see how lovely they become just because they lay themselves open to the sweet forces of God, does it not occur to you that His loving-kindness is capable of greater things, that it *can* and will make your hearts and lives so beautiful in all goodness, that no words can express it?

And finally, let me remind you that *every spring-time gives us thoughts of the eternal loving-kindness of the Lord; of that power which will keep our lives and make them new for ever.* It speaks to us of

resurrection. It is, in fact, a rising from the dead. It is a springing up of life where no life appeared. Renewed vitality triumphs in places where cold, stern death had absolute dominion. Songs of gladness are heard in desolate, silent places. Joy starts up from ashes; beauty is created out of the very dust; we feel instinctively that all this is a symbol of better things. The spring-time whispers to us promises of the great beyond. It joins with Him who conquered death in speaking the language of hope. This is surely why the old, and the weary, and the disappointed love the spring-time. Amid the changes of life and its losses, and the many dead things of which memory tells, they hail the words of hope, the intimations of renewal and immortality, which are borne on the breath of flowers. They see old affections restored, and lost loves given back again, and all life's colours painted afresh in the presence of God; for it is not hard to believe that the power which can make a spring-time out of a winter, and wrap the dead trees in garments of vestal grace, can raise the weary and jaded life into the vigour and freshness of immortal life again. So let the season speak to us this morning: "Whoso is wise and will observe these things!"

MAN'S HARVEST AND GOD'S

By W. L. WALKER

MAN'S HARVEST AND GOD'S

"The harvest is the end of the world."—MATT. xiii. 39.

FROM every field in harvest time a great sermon is being preached to us. The law of the harvest operates in the entire world and in the whole of life. It runs throughout the universe. There is a harvest of life as well as of grain; a harvest of the world as well as of our fields. Man has his harvest, and God also has His.

"The harvest," said Jesus, "is the end of the world." Shall this world have an end—this world so wonderfully fashioned, so full of interest, to many of us so very good? Most assuredly it shall. Scripture, science, and philosophy are here at one. Scripture often speaks of "the end of all things" here. Science assures us that the sun on which our world depends cannot give out sufficient heat for ever. Philosophy lays it down that everything that exists in finite form must also in that form come to an end: only the Infinite can endure for ever.

What then, we cannot but ask, is the meaning of it all—of this life with all its activities, interests,

pleasures, and tragedies? It is quite meaningless if there be nothing beyond that which we can see. But would that be like God? Can He have no ultimate meaning, no final purpose in the world which He has created? Would the All-wise go on sowing with no expectation of ever reaping? No, Christ assures us (and reason heartily assents to the statement) that all is with a view to a final harvest, a harvest in the unseen and eternal, which shall be at once that of man and that of God. It is for *this* that the world exists. The end of the world shall come just as surely as our waving fields of grain reach their end in the harvest—the end of the world *does* come to each one of us at death —and at the end of the world its harvest is reaped —the great harvest of life, both man's harvest and God's.

I.

Man's Harvest. Let us look at this first—the harvest of our own individual life.

We are *sowing* now in all that we do: what is it that we shall reap? It will be just the final outcome of our lives. Not anything material; for all that is material comes to an end; it can only be unseen and spiritual realities, the inner and enduring realities of our spirit and character, of the spiritual personality and deathless soul. And the law which determines of what *kind* this shall be is the same

that determines the kind of every harvest. "Be not deceived," writes the apostle, "whatsoever a man *sows* that shall he also reap." If a man sows good seed in his field, he will (other things being equal) reap a harvest of good grain; if he sows tares, he will certainly reap tares. It needs no punitive power to interfere to make this result certain: it is the inevitable law of the harvest. Now St Paul says most truly that there are two kinds of sowing open to men, according to which shall be the harvest: to "the flesh" or to "the Spirit." A man may live to himself and to the things of the earthly nature and the outward, material world merely—that is "sowing to the flesh" —and "of the flesh," says Paul, he shall reap what the flesh alone can give—"corruption." Or he may live for the higher and enduring things of God and the best interests of others, for the things of truth, of righteousness, and love; he may seek in the Spirit of Christ to follow the Christ-like life. That is "sowing to the Spirit," and of the Spirit he shall reap the harvest of eternal life—the full fruition of his being in the eternity of God. The Gospel message is that God in Christ has made it possible for every man thus to sow to the Spirit, and so reap the harvest of the Spirit—eternal life. All sins may be forgiven, and the spirit and power of a new life be made his. But if a man will not receive the Spirit and live to the Spirit, he cannot expect to reap the fruits of the Spirit-life. "God

is not mocked: that which a man *sows*, he shall also reap."

This law regulates the harvest of our life, not only in kind, but also in *quantity*. A man reaps, in general, according to the pains he takes, the labour he expends, and also according to the liberality of his sowing. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." We see this illustrated all throughout life; in every sphere, a man receives according to the effort he puts forth, although, of course, circumstances make exceptions to the rule; and it is the law of the final harvest. If we just barely take up the Christian life, without earnestness, without enthusiasm; if we study how we can save ourselves from sacrifice instead of freely giving ourselves up to Christ and His service, we shall also reap sparingly in the great coming harvest. The more devoted, earnest, self-sacrificing we are, the larger, richer, more joyous our reaping shall be. Since there is nothing more absolutely certain than that our individual harvest shall be according to the seed we sow and *as* we sow it, we may well ask ourselves *what* are we sowing, and *how?* Are we sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit; to time and sense, or to God and eternity? to self and the world, or to Christ and the good of others? According to what *measure* are we sowing? Are we only taking up Christianity so far as we think we can be saved, but guarding ourselves against

going too far in our devotion? Or have we taken it up earnestly, enthusiastically, giving ourselves up to Christ, and sowing to the Spirit with no stinted hand, largely and liberally? Or is it possible that we are not thinking at all about *what* we are sowing —keeping the surely-coming harvest out of mind entirely; perhaps sowing actually bad seed, which is certain to have its harvest as well as the good seed.

"We scatter seed with a careless hand;
But, *what shall the harvest be?*"

II.

Such is man's harvest; but Christ teaches that *God* has His Harvest also—"The harvest is the end of the world."

Yes, God is the great Sower; only because *He* has first sown, is it possible for us to sow with any effect. His field is infinite space, and the seed that of worlds innumerable. Look up to the sky on a clear frosty night, and count the stars if you can. Those which we see are only a sample of myriads which we never see. There are stars the light from which has not yet reached our world. Or take a map of a portion of the heavens on a large scale. What is it like? You will see it dotted with points of starry light thick as the grains of corn lie on our fields when we sow them. These are all worlds, or stars, or growing into suns that will light worlds. All these are God's

sowing—the outcome of that infinite Love which is forever giving forth from out of itself:—

> "Love is the root of creation : God's essence ; worlds without number
> Lie in His bosom like children ; He made them for this purpose only ;
> Only to love and to be loved again, He breathed forth His Spirit."

Forever, with unstinted hand, He is scattering abroad this world-seed, sowing the fields of space therewith with the bountifulness of infinite goodness. For what does He do it? Is it done vainly or unconsciously? Is there no meaning or purpose in it? He does it for the same reason that we, imitating Him, sow our earthly fields with grain: with a view to the harvest, which will be at once His own joy and that of the beings to whom He gives life in His likeness. Everywhere the law of the harvest works. All throughout space God's world-seed is growing, and in our own world we see it ripened for the harvest. This is what gives this small globe of earth such immense importance, although most probably there are other worlds of which the same holds good. God does nothing in vain. He scatters all that "precious seed" with a view to its return to Himself, not merely in material worlds, but in beings arising thereon who can recognise His work, who can respond to His Love, who can rise above the material to the spiritual, above the temporal to the eternal, and so become His children and share in the eternal

life and blessedness which are His. It is not for selfish increase, but for loving shedding abroad of the Divine life and blessedness. Our world has reached that stage where a return can be looked for; therefore, "the harvest is the end of the world." The material exists only for the spiritual, the temporal for the eternal, man himself for God and for eternal life in Him. God looks for a spiritual and eternal outcome from it all, which it is for us to render to Him, and it is in rendering this that we reap our own harvest in its glad, full, and eternal fruition.

But *evil* strangely springs up in God's world as well as good, when a field has been provided for that free action of man apart from which he would not be man above Nature, but only a continuation of her mechanism. In this world we witness a mixed life: there is good, but also evil. Often, too, the evil seems to predominate over the good. It seems strange and perplexing. It is the work, Jesus said, of that power of evil that is always striving with the good. In our world we see it to be seated in that lower, half-animal self which refuses to rise to the higher life. In this world, the evil seemed almost to have ruined the prospect of God's harvest. But the power of His Love was not exhausted. He did not turn away as if in despair, sending forth a fiat of judgment against it, as Isaiah represents Him doing in the case of Israel, when He asks: "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth

grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" No; He visited it anew in His grace, and sowed it once again with the still deeper riches of the seed of His love, coming in Christ to redeem and save it. Christ came and not only sowed "the good seed" of "the Word," but gave Himself up for the world's redemption, watered it with His blood, so that God's harvest and man's might not be lost.

> "'Twas great to speak a world from nought,
> 'Twas greater to redeem."

Still, there is evil in God's world in the present time, even in those favoured fields of Christendom, even within the sacred enclosure of the Church. It shall be so, Christ teaches, *till the harvest.* Then there will be a twofold process. The evil will be rooted up and destroyed: the good wheat shall be gathered into that eternal kingdom of God for which all that is temporal exists. There shall be no *loss.* All that is from Himself shall return to Himself in the fruition of the law of the harvest: the evil, which is *not* from Himself, shall disappear for ever. Good and bad, true and false, exist now side by side, and man cannot make a right separation between them: Jesus said that men were not to attempt it; but it shall not be so for ever. The harvest is coming, when an effectual separation shall be made. Evil may triumph now and the true and right may be trampled down; but at "the harvest" all that shall be changed. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in

the day wherein I do make a peculiar treasure: then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." "Then shall the righteous," said Jesus, "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Here we still have the law of the harvest. "False wheat," and other noxious growths, are not fit for the garner. But it is *souls* that we are dealing with, not mere unconscious grain; souls conceived in the image of God. We must, therefore, hope that the infinite Father has still resources for their recovery; but we can only *hope;* there is no revelation; and our hope must be grounded on the fact that all proceeded originally from Himself, and must all return to Him. "With God," Jesus said, "all things are possible."

III.

This is the great Harvest, both of Creation and of Grace — God's ingathering to Himself of His children, in whom He finds His glory and joy, and to whom these are imparted.

It is in this that He finds the answer to His sacrifice, and reaps His Divine harvest. Christ is "the first-fruits," "the first-begotten from the dead," "the first-born among many brethren." In Him the first sheaf was gathered in, to which the whole harvest shall be conformed. For it was the "eternal purpose" that we should be conformed to the image of His

Son. This "bringing of many sons unto glory"—men and women inspired by the Spirit of His Son, inwardly and outwardly conformed to Christ—is the great, eternally enduring harvest that God looks for, that with a view to which He created and redeemed the world; and, of course, it is *our* great and eternal harvest also.

It is at once a solemnising and a cheering thought. Life has a deep and high meaning. Earth exists with a view to an ultimate harvest, the seen for the unseen, the temporal for the eternal, man for God, and in all God is working for the sake of man. It is in our arising in His own image and becoming children in His likeness that He sees the end for which He sows the seed of worlds and redeems them by His self-sacrificing Love. Good and evil are in His field now, but the evil shall be utterly rooted up, and the good alone shall endure for ever. Let us remember, therefore, when we are sowing our earthly seed, or when we look upon the fields, "white unto the harvest," that *in the kind of life we are living* we are sowing the seed of a harvest which we must without fail reap when this world for us takes end; and that as we sow we shall also reap. And let us think of God as looking for His harvest in that which we can either give Him or withhold from Him. To find it is the very motive of His creation and the meaning of our existence here. His purpose cannot fail, save through our determined opposition to Him or failure to respond to His love and to work with Him, in view of life's

great harvest. Whatever may be the case with other worlds, we know that, in the case of our world, He has not only created it, but redeemed it from sin and ruin by sending Christ His own Son to sow in our hearts the seed of the word of truth, and, by giving Himself for our sins, to recall us to God and to become the seed of the true life within us. As we watch with interest our fields and look for the harvest, so God watches His world. He looks for the return of all that He has expended in His self-sacrificing love, in human hearts that respond to that love, in sons and daughters who come to Him as their Father, who delight to do His will on the earth, and who are finally brought home to be eternally with Him in His glory.

In this God's harvest and man's are *one*. For, if it is in our so entering into this filial relationship to God, with its eternal consequences, that He reaps His harvest, it is also just in this that we find our own true good here and our eternal blessedness. But if we will not respond to God's love now, we cannot expect to reap the fruit of a harvest the seed of which we have never sown. To entertain such an expectation would be, in the strong language of the apostle, "to mock God." Certainly no one would willingly or consciously "mock" God; but the word the apostle employs (which means, literally, "to turn up the nose at," as when one thinks he has got the better of another), Bishop Lightfoot says, "involves, as a secondary meaning, the idea of contradicting one's

language by one's gesture or look, and so implies the outward avowal of respect neutralised by an indirect expression of contempt." The danger is that, while we outwardly express our regard for God and respect for His laws, we may *live* as if we had no real belief in them, as if we could cheat them, while, of course, we are only cheating ourselves. The law of the harvest is a universal and an unchanging one: "Whatsoever a man sows, that he shall also reap." But the gospel makes it possible for any man to cease sowing to his flesh and to begin to sow to the Spirit, and so to become ensured of reaping the blessed harvest of eternal life.

IV.

To each one of us—to men and women individually—we have said that "the end of the world" comes at death. So far as *we* are concerned, that is its end or consummation. We can thus think of God's Harvest as being always in the process of being reaped, sheaf after sheaf being gathered in, yea, in each moment many sheaves brought home to Him. "The reapers are the angels."

You remember Christ's picture of poor Lazarus being carried home by the angels. God's angels are always here in many forms, and are always working for God and man. They are always busy in His great world-field. Amongst them there is one who, because his face is shaded, presents a dark aspect to us—"that

reaper whose name is Death"—whom we dread, but who is, on his Godward side, an angel of light, reaping God's "ripened grain," and often "the flowers that grow between"; while other angels, perhaps not altogether strangers to us, carry the sheaves (and the flowers also) home to God.

Thus, all the time is with God one, not only of sowing and waiting, but of reaping also. And if it is when we die we begin to reap in its fullness the harvest of our life—that which we have sown for ourselves—is it not also as men and women die, as they pass from the materially expressed world to that spiritual realm which is its source and destined end, that the *separation* is made? Is it not *then* that God's sheaves, brought home to Him by His angels, are stored up in the eternal kingdom, amidst that "joy of reaping," which is not postponed, but is and shall be always ringing, till the last sheaf has been safely gathered in? The judgment, indeed, which issues in the final separation, is taking effect here and now, within our own selves; we are passing it every day, on and in ourselves, according as we sow to "the flesh" or to "the Spirit"; but the *result* is not here made *manifest;* only "the day shall declare it."

"All this world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield:
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear:
Lord of Harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be."

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

By FRED. LUKE WISEMAN, B.A.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance."—GALATIANS v. 22, 23 (R.V.).

FRUIT is the spontaneous outcome of the life of the tree—its finished product. Given a tree, one may confidently forecast the nature of the fruit. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; the fig-tree produces the fig, the vine the grape. In like manner, the Spirit has its natural product: it yields fruit. And its fruit after its kind is in the graces of Christian character here set forth.

Some shrink from thus appearing to bring the work of the Spirit under the dominion of natural law. The notion seems to them to eliminate His essential freedom. They think of Him as "blowing where He listeth," impatient of restraint, irresponsibly bestowing His gifts, delighting in surprises, preferring to act contrary to natural law rather than in accordance with it; moving men to unusual, unpremeditated, and otherwise unaccountable action. Now doubtless there is, and must be, a large element of surprise in the Spirit's work, but it is referable rather to our

narrow range of vision than to His irresponsibility and irregularity. Had we larger knowledge, we should recognise the entire suitability and profound wisdom of His acts. He works, not arbitrarily, but according to the all-wise, if inscrutable, counsel of His own will. Even in the bestowal of His gifts, which He divides as He will, He has respect both to each man's profit and the grace already given, and also to the sublime purpose which rules all His operations in the Church. But while there is no Christian who has not received some gift of the Spirit, the manifestation of such endowment is not the proof of the indwelling of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit—His infallible sign, that to which He directs His energies, wherein is promise of the continued manifestation of His life, and in whose attainment He is satisfied—is to be found in *Christian character*, in the possession and manifestation of the love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, gentleness, and other virtues and graces which Paul here sets forth. The sign of His operation is ethical. His purpose, the natural outcome of His indwelling, is the production of a holy, happy life. This may be a little chilling to religious æstheticism and romanticism, but it is nevertheless true. The fruit of the Spirit is neither in brilliant endowment, rare powers, exalted vision, clear and correct thinking, or glowing feeling; but just in downright, good living. If a man fail here, whatever else he may possess, he has no right to believe that he has the Spirit of God; and if anyone

have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. On the other hand, if these qualities are being produced in him, he need not mourn the absence of the more showy and attractive gifts, or desire any further assurance of the presence of the Spirit with him.

But a little reflection makes clear that *the Apostle's words, far from being forbidding, are actually most welcome and inspiring.* This is the message they bring to us:—The life of a good man—the life which all people know they ought to live, but which so few, and they only after prolonged self-discipline, attain —is, through the gospel, within the reach of all; and that not as a more or less uncertain issue, but as a quite natural, one would say, inevitable result. Receive the Spirit of Christ, and He works in you to will and to do of the Father's good pleasure; and in the time of fruit you will display love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance.

We are not saying that none of these virtues are produced in the life of them who know not, or who deny Christ. The names of scores of whom we have heard or read, of some perchance whom we know, rise up as witnesses to the contrary. The great moral systems of the ancient world had profound influence. Among non-Christian peoples many virtues flourish. But the crop is partial; it is raised with the greatest difficulty; it is not wheat of the finest quality, and it is mixed with tares. *Their moral system lacks a dynamic.* It is a code rather than a life. It is imposed from without rather than

impelled from within. It tends to self-righteousness rather than to holiness. Its eye is on man rather than on God. Of all moral teaching none was better than that of Judaism, nor was any sown in a better-prepared soil; yet was the result disappointing. Condemn sin in the flesh and produce righteousness of heart and life, the law could not. The good Paul would do, he did not; the evil he would not, that he did. In full knowledge of this moral impotence, Paul boldly erects an even more exalted moral standard, and then declares that its attainment is possible to all. Good character is not a freak, but a fruit. If the living Spirit dwell within, He will assuredly produce this token of His life in man.

Moreover, *the number of the virtues recited, and their seeming contrariety, must not dismay.* To abound in any one of these gracious qualities would repay for a generation of self-discipline and toil. To possess the nine, were to be a moral prodigy indeed! It is just this, however, which St Paul says is the natural consequence of the life of the Spirit. He produces in us not one grace only, but all together. He says not "fruits," as of many, as though the Tree of Life bore nine manner of fruits, appearing in nine different forms; but "fruit," as of one, of which these nine qualities are the constituent elements. Singly they may be found elsewhere, but in union one with another they form the fruit of the Spirit, the ripe product of the Gospel of Christ. Just as an apple has many qualities in common with other fruit, but

has also such a combination of them as marks it off from others, so also is the fruit of the Spirit. The union of these nine qualities is the distinctive characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit. Where the Spirit works, He produces them all in each fruit. With so many constituent qualities, the greatest variety is obtainable. Yet is it all the fruit of the Spirit. To revert to our former illustration, apples are of many kinds; they differ in size, appearance, and colour. Some are sweeter, some tarter; some harder, some softer; some ruddier, some greener. All have the constituents of the apple, but not all in the same proportion. So with the fruit of the Spirit. It is found in charming variety. One has more love, another more joy, another more self-control, another more meekness, and so on. All the essential qualities are in each, but in different proportions, giving the amiable variety that is necessary to show forth all the manifold wisdom of God.

It would be a delightful study to examine under the light of this observation *the various species of the fruit of the Spirit*, as they were exhibited in the lives of the apostles and of their helpers. All shew the characteristics of the species and their own distinctive peculiarity as well. How widely different, and yet how entirely harmonious are the three leading types of the New Testament saints, St Peter, St Paul, and St John, with their many sub-species and varieties! Even Churches, both in ancient and modern days, develop certain phases of character. One would

almost be able to distinguish the Corinthian from the Ephesian Christian, and both of these again from the Philippian; while all the saints, and all the Churches, though differing among themselves, would be easily recognisable from all non-Christian individuals and communities.

By their fruit, therefore, as the Master said, are His disciples known. *Just in the manifestation of these characteristic virtues in their union does the world recognise the supremacy of the Christian religion.* Do what it will, it cannot produce the like. The recrudescence of startling spiritual gifts or materialistic miracles, for which so many are sighing, would not greatly impress the present sceptical and cynical age. The modern Egyptian magicians would be able to emulate the wonders of the modern Moses. But genuine Christian character—loving, cheerful, calm, forbearing, considerate, genuine, trustworthy, unassuming, self-controlled—they cannot, and know they cannot, produce. "This is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can"; and seeing it, they confess that God is amongst us of a truth. Still the men of this age mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, and wish that their life, and especially their death, may be fruitful, like his.

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